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**Order Number 8910139**

**Reform and revolution in Shi'i Islam: The thought of Ali  
Shariati**

**Navabi, Abbas, Ph.D.**

**Indiana University, 1988**

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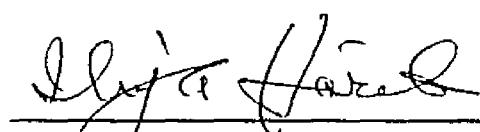
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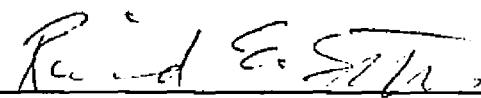
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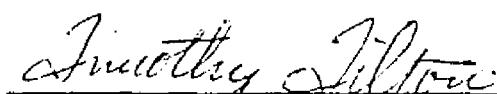
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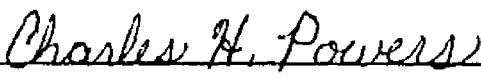
Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial  
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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank members of my dissertation committee, Iliya Harik, Richard Stryker, Timothy Tilton, and Charles Power, for their patience, encouragement, and advice in writing my dissertation. My special gratitude goes to Iliya Harik who has devoted much time throughout many years to my general education and intellectual growth. It is one of the greatest rewards of my life to have known Iliya as a person, a scholar, and a teacher. I hope that my work reflects his efforts.

I would also like to thank Deborah Navabi, my wife, who gave me love and support throughout the years and endured hardship for the completion of this work. Finally, I want to thank Sussan Navabi, my little daughter, who has brought me boundless joy as well as a sense of urgency to complete this dissertation.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The ideological upheaval that culminated in the Iranian Revolution of 1979 had its roots in the conscious efforts of a number of Iranian religiopolitical thinkers to "reconstruct" Shi'i Islam as an ideology of social transformation. One of the most outstanding and original among those who contributed to the shaping of Shi'i Islam as a revolutionary ideology was Dr. Ali Shariati (1933-1977). The subject of my dissertation is Shariati's social and political thought.

#### Shariati's Life and Impact

Shariati was born in November 23, 1933 in Mazinan, a village near Mashhad, to a family long distinguished for great erudition and scholarship.<sup>1</sup> His lineage could boast of outstanding men of learning including one Allama Bahmanabadi, a nineteenth century theologian, who taught Islamic philosophy in the Sepahsalar Madrasa in Tehran. Shariati's father, Muhammad Taqi Shariati (b. 1907), is an accomplished scholar and publicist who is well known and highly respected in Iran and elsewhere in the Shi'i world for his published works and for his lifelong devotion to the religious education of the modern youth.<sup>2</sup> It was in "The Center for the Propagation of Islamic Truths" in Mashhad

founded by his father that the young Shariati began his career as a researcher and educator. He also taught in secular public schools as a certified graduate of Teachers Training College in Mashhad. Shariati began his political engagement during the Mosaddegh era in the early fifties. After the coup d'etat of 1953 which resulted in Mosaddegh's overthrow, Shariati joined the underground National Resistance Movement founded by Ayatollah Mahmud Taleghani and Mehdi Bazargan, both leading religious figures in Mosaddegh's National Front. In 1957, Shariati and his father were arrested and imprisoned for a short time along with fourteen other leaders of the movement. Shariati's early works include "The Median School" in which he portrays Islam as a school of thought distinct from and superior to dominant ideologies of capitalism and socialism and views the Islamic community as an independent global force which should be "neither Eastern nor Western,"<sup>3</sup> a Quranic phrase that has become the central slogan of Islamic Iran's foreign policy. He also translated, in 1955, a book from Arabic on the life of Abuzar, an ascetic companion of the Prophet Muhammad regarded by Muslim radicals as a pioneer of socialism in Islam.

In 1958, Shariati completed his M.A. degree in the University of Mashhad with a specialization in literature and the humanities and was granted a scholarship to continue his studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, France. In the same year he married Puran Razavi the sister of a university student recently slain in a demonstration against Nixon visit to Iran. At the Sorbonne, Shariati studied Islamology, sociology of religion and philology. Besides the formal course of studies which he pursued under such celebrated scholars as Louis Massignon, Jacques

Berque, and Georges Gurvitch, Shariati immersed himself in the study of contemporary social and political philosophy and modern ideologies. Shariati's stay in Paris coincided with the Algerian Revolution which he closely followed and actively supported. He was particularly impressed by the ideological role of Islam in the Algerian Revolution. He corresponded with Fanon on the question of religion and revolution trying to persuade the latter of liberating potential of Islam in the anti-imperialist struggles of Muslim peoples.<sup>4</sup> Shariati was also involved in the Iranian opposition movement in Europe against the Shah's regime and edited Free Iran, a publication of Mosaddegh's National Front in Europe and The Persian Letter, the monthly journal of the Iranian Students Confederation.

In 1966, immediately after his return to Iran, Shariati was arrested and imprisoned for six months and was denied a position at Tehran University. Later he taught at Mashhad University for a time but was soon forced to retire. In 1967, Shariati took a lectureship at Hosseiniyyeh Ershad, a modern institution of Islamic learning and scholarship in Tehran where many of the prominent intellectual leaders of the 1979 revolution taught and studied. This was the most prolific period in Shariati's life. He lectured and wrote extensively. His works, some 20 books and 50 pamphlets, were printed in great numbers and enjoyed a vast readership unprecedented in the history of book publishing in Iran. Shariati was a gifted orator and a brilliant theorist. His call for an Islamic renaissance and his novel interpretations of Islamic concepts and Shi'i principles met with enthusiastic response by young students and intellectuals throughout

Iran. Shariati's ideas and his increasing popularity alarmed the regime and offended some members of the clerical establishment. Even for some of his own associates Shariati proved to be too innovative in religion and too radical in politics. In 1972, Hosseiniyyeh Ershad was closed down and Shariati was arrested and put in prison until 1975 when, reportedly, pressure from European intellectual circles and the mediation of Algerian government secured his release. In 1977, after two years of living under house arrest, Shariati was able to leave the country with the intention of coming to the United States. But one month after his arrival in London he died, according to the report of a British coroner, of a massive heart attack at the age 43. Shariati's sympathizers at the time believed that he was martyred by the SAVAK, the Shah's secret police.

Shariati's ideas continued to attract large audiences and his followers continued the tradition which he had relentlessly worked to establish. At the time of the revolution many young Iranians having, once again embraced Islam, recognized in Khomeini, Shariati's "revolutionary hero" and upon Khomeini's call for resistance they inscribed on the walls Shariati's phrase: "Martyr is the Heart of history." While Shariati had the most impact on the intellectuals, his efforts were aimed at nothing short of creating the idea that would seize the masses. This is, indeed, the central significance of Shariati. He brought to the Islamic reform movement in Iran the idea that Shi'i Islam was capable of being reconstructed as revolutionary mass ideology. During the Iranian Revolution, whatever the attitude toward Shariati's interpretation of particular Islamic concepts and

Shi'i precepts, Shariati's spirit as well his ideas permeated the movement.

#### THE MEANING OF SHARIATI

In his works, Shariati left a legacy of social and political thought unmatched in the intellectual history of modern Iran. However, Shariati's significance goes beyond Iran. Shariati is the first thinker in the Muslim world to have attempted a comprehensive and systematic ideology based on principles of Islam and informed by modern social theory. He belongs to several world intellectual traditions: the tradition of Islamic renaissance pioneered by Afghani and Abduh; the tradition of Third World revolutionary thought established by Frantz Fanon and Julius Nyerere, and the Western intellectual tradition exemplified by Marxism and academic social theory. He tried to synthesize these traditions into a coherent body of thought in a way that would be true to fundamental principles of Islam yet cognizant of the challenges of the modern world and responsive to the needs of Iranians and Muslims for independence, development, and social justice. It is this giant attempt which makes the appreciation of Shariati essential to understanding the contemporary political thought in the Islamic Middle East.

Shariati's ideas can best be appreciated when considered in relation to the central problem faced by contemporary Third World societies, namely, the problem of the relation between culture and development, between identity and modernity. More specifically the question confronting Muslim societies, for more than a century, has been one of how to bring a concrete sense of cultural and moral

integrity to bear on the performance of new tasks posed by the modern world.

Historically, the responsibility for integrating identity and modernity in the Islamic world fell to the nationalist intellectuals and reform minded Muslims. Concerned exclusively with the external threat to the Islamic community, the ulama, the custodian of the traditional culture, (with a few exceptions) clung to Islamic identity and remained unperturbed by the new challenges facing Muslim societies. By contrast, the nationalist intellectuals in their exclusive concern with problems of development, negated or underestimated the relevance of Islam to modernity and created new symbols of collective identity such as language, ethnicity, or the memory of some distant golden age in the history of their people. However, as the nationalist search for identity was primarily instrumentalist in nature motivated by the desire to legitimate particular political action, the nationalist intellectuals gradually came to abandon the efforts to establish cultural continuity in the life of their peoples and communities. It is to the credit of Islamic reform movement pioneered by Afghani and Abduh and continued by Eqbal of Pakistan to lay the foundation for a positive critical approach to the cultural tradition and to relate Islam to the questions of political and social development. However, due to certain historical and intellectual limits Islamic reform movement did not become a well integrated tradition and soon came to be divided into modernism and revivalism. The nationalist intellectuals supported by the modernists concentrated on the problems of modernization and development. The problem of the relation between

culture and development remained unresolved and the more Islamic societies developed the wider grew the gap between the elite and the masses, between the state and society.

What we have said of the ulama and the nationalist intellectuals in the Islamic Middle East is also true of Iran. However, Islamic reformist orientation, that is, the systematic intellectual attempt to relate Islam to problems of modern society and economy did not become a significant tradition in the Iranian society. Instead, we witness in Iran a rich tradition of religious political activism and resistance against imperialism and imposed modernism as exemplified by the participation of the ulama in the Tobacco protest (1891-92), the Constitutional Revolution (1906-7); and 1963 July Uprising led by Ayatollah Khomeini. Shariati not only introduced the idea of reform and reconstruction of Islam into Iran but brought together Islamic reformism and Iranian religious activism by giving his ideas of Islamic reform a definite ideological direction. He posed anew the question of the relation between Islamic identity and modernity not only for Iran, his immediate area of concern, but for the whole of the Islamic World. The solution of the question, in Shariati's view, required both an Islamic intellectual and a social revolution entailing a critique and reconstruction of Islamic thought as well as a critique and restructuring of modernity. Shariati considered an intellectual revolution in Islamic view of the world, man, and society to be the prerequisite for social transformation in the Islamic world. In one of his first essays written in 1955 after the the defeat of Mosaddegh's Nationalist movement, young Shariati, lamenting the condition of

dependence, oppression, and disunity in the Islamic world, concludes his brief survey of social transformations in the Western world with the observation that all such transformations have been preceded by intellectual revolutions. Accordingly, he writes:

The movements of the Islamic nations for independence will be also possess an ideology in which the philosophical, economic, ethical, national, social, political and other questions are stated with clarity. The essential point is that the edifice of such an ideology must be erected with the ingredients that Islam has bequeathed to us and that it must be designed with inspiration from liberating and sacred teachings of the Quran.<sup>5</sup>

What distinguishes Shariati's idea of intellectual revolution from the past Islamic reformism is that such change is the work of a few outstanding intellectual elite implemented from above by the rulers and educators but a collective effort by all Muslim intellectuals and carried out by the Muslim masses.

The foundation of such a movement rests with each individual Muslim and it is the common people that must regain the lost sovereignty of Muslims, the same people that in the beginning of Islam strengthened the Islamic movement with selfless dedications. Fourteen centuries ago it was a group of slaves, date sellers, camel grazers, and wage earners that followed the creed of Muhammad and created the world Islamic movement. Today, also, it is the working people, the farmers, the shopkeepers, the civil servants, and the students that must revive that movement.<sup>6</sup>

As to the substance of Shariati's idea of Islamic reform besides a persistent concern with backwardness of Islamic societies which he shared with other Muslim reformers, it is his uncompromising anti-imperialism and social egalitarianism that set Shariati apart from most Islamic reformers of the past. It is to be noted that early Islamic resurgence was in great measure a response to Western colonialism and imperialism. However, Islamic reformers especially Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Abdurrahman came to reconcile themselves with the

fact of Western domination either as something beneficial or temporary. Instead, the reformers focused on gradual internal reform in legal, educational, and political institutions. For Shariati, the most important dimension of Islamic revival as an idea and as a movement is the eradication of Western domination in all its forms from the life of Islamic societies. Only a strong and independent Muslim society could determine what to adopt or reject from Western ideas and practices. Also, due to their elitist orientation and the influence of liberal ideas, the Islamic reformers with the exception of Eqbal did not concern themselves with the issue of social justice and equality. By contrast, this concern permeates Shariati's thought.

#### The Aim and Approach of the Study

The purpose of the present study is to present and analyze Shariati's social and political ideas systematically as an interrelated body of thought. The central thesis of the study is that Shariati employed a knowledge of contemporary social philosophy and theory to formulate a revolutionary Islamic ideology based with anti-imperialist, developmental and egalitarian orientation.

This is a study in political thought. But it is equally a study of an important aspect of political development. Unlike the main current of Western political thought which does not aim to serve political action directly, the predominant feature of social and political thought in the Third World is orientation to action. Ideology remains a major component of the search by the people in the Third World for what Clifford Geertz called "a new symbolic framework in terms of which to formulate, think about and react to political

problems.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it is methodologically sound to approach Shariati's political thought in terms of ideology. Another and perhaps stronger reason is that Shariati conceived his own intellectual project as an outline for an Islamic ideology. Ideology here is taken to mean a set of more or less systematic ideas, descriptive as well as prescriptive, about man's place in nature, in history, and in society with the potentiality to elicit the commitment of a significant number of people to (or against) sociopolitical change.<sup>8</sup> Thus, Shariati's ideas will be presented as a system of thought with a philosophical foundation, a theory of history and society and a vision of the ideal political order. The latter will contain Shariati's political philosophy proper, that is, his ideas of community, authority, and democracy.

The thesis of the study also implies the substance of my approach to Shariati. Shariati talked and wrote on diverse and sometimes unrelated themes. But he was above all a "Third Worldist" thinker the corpus of whose work is devoted to the formulation of an ideology of national liberation and egalitarian development. His thought is a particular case of the general observation made by Kemal Karpat that "the political and social ideas expressed in the nations of the Middle East are an inseparable part of the general process of modernization."<sup>9</sup> Shariati's ideas can best understood in the light of this perspective. Such a perspective would also help us avoid the error not uncommon in the study of the Third World thought, of applying political concepts without proper regard for meaning and context of ideas. There are also a number of questions raised in the current discussion of Shi'i

political theory which can be profitably considered in assessing Shariati's Political ideas. Is Shi'i political doctrine accommodationist, oppositional, or revolutionary? The question is not merely an academic one but concerns the legitimacy of the undertaking by Ayatollah Khomeini and from our vantage point by Shariati to formulate a revolutionary Shi'i doctrine. My aim will not be to settle this question, which is beyond the scope of this study, but to reconstruct Shariati's arguments in defense of Shi'ism as a revolutionary political ideology.

## CHAPTER I

### NOTES

1. For the brief biographical sketch of Shariati presented here draws on the following sources: Gholam Abbas Tavassoli, "Introduction: A Biobibliographical Sketch" in On the Sociology of Islam: Lectures by Ali Shariati, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979) and Mehdi Abedi, "Ali Shariati: The Architect of the 1979 Islamic Revolution of Iran," Iranian Studies 19, Nos. 3-4 (1986), PP. 229-234.
2. For an account of the life and works of Shariati's father see the Kayhan-e Farhangi, No. 11 (1984), PP. 5-12.
3. See Shariati, Collected Works. Vol. 31: Characteristics of the Modern Centuries (Tehran: Chapakhsh, 1982), PP. 6-7.
4. For such correspondence from Frantz Fanon to Shariati is published in Islamology (Mashhad: Tus, 1968), PP. 15-16.
5. Shariati, Characteristics, P. 5.
6. Ibid., P.6.
7. Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in Ideology and Discontent, ed. David E. Apter (New York: Free Press, 1964), P.65.
8. This definition is adopted from C. B. Macpherson cited in his "Revolution and Ideology in the Late Twentieth Century," in Revolution, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Atherton, 1966), P. 40.
9. Kemal Karpat, ed., Social and Political Thought in Contemporary Middle East (New York: Praeger, 1963), P.3.

CHAPTER II  
ISLAM AND THE IRANIAN SOCIETY:  
A PROJECT FOR REFORM

The Basic Question of Shariati

The concern of Shariati in light of which his works as a whole can be grasped is emancipation from a condition of cultural, economic and political oppression.<sup>1</sup> Shariati's primary frame of reference is Iran. But, insofar as he formulates his ideas within the tradition of Islamic thought and because he situates Iran in the context of the Islamic and Third World, the relevance of his works goes beyond the Iranian society.

Shariati's writings were conceived to be more than intellectual reflections and efforts at persuasion but a direct intervention in the condition of oppression and a definite contribution to a movement for emancipation. The ideological character of Shariati's works, however, must not obscure the specific nature of his contribution. Shariati has often been characterized, as the "ideologue" of the Iranian Revolution of 1979.<sup>2</sup> It is true that Shariati made a decisive contribution to the development of Shi'i Islam as a revolutionary ideology. Moreover, Shariati directly inspired some of the slogans as well as thousands of intellectuals that actively participated in the revolution. Yet, to characterize Shariati as the ideologue of the 1979 Islamic revolution is to misunderstand the nature of Shariati's project as well his

vision. It was Shariati's aim and wish to contribute to and eventually effect a thoroughgoing ideological revolution in the ways of thinking about and looking at the world within the world view of Shi'i Islam.<sup>3</sup> According to Shariati, without such a revolution for the success of which "two to three generations must work...we will be thrown back a hundred years."<sup>4</sup> He found the dangers of a premature revolution evident not only in Africa and Asia but also in the experience of the Iranian Revolution of 1905:

The reason for the failure of the Constitutional Revolution was that the leaders, without having raised the social consciousness and the political awareness of the people, embarked on the ultimate solution...and once again we observed that imposing a revolution on a society which has not reached consciousness and lacks a revolutionary culture results but in a set of progressive but unfulfilled slogans.<sup>5</sup>

It is no paradox, then, that while Shariati believed that a revolution of social emancipation was the work of the masses themselves, he addressed not the masses but the intellectuals. He addressed the intellectuals not as the leaders and organizers of a revolution but as potential agents of awakening and enlightenment. Shariati was, above all, an architect of such enlightenment. Shariati had envisioned a revolution of social emancipation a long way off. If anything, the recent Iranian revolution interrupted the process which Shariati had initiated and the consummation of which he had considered to be the most fundamental prerequisite for the success of a true revolution.

Shariati conceived of the condition of oppression at three levels: the community, the social class, and the individual. At the level of the community, oppression entailed a paralyzed capacity to produce

material and ideal values and to resist imperialist domination. At the level of social class, it meant subjection to exploitation and inequality inherited from the past socioeconomic structures and aggravated by the introduction of dependent capitalism. At the level of the individual, oppression entailed a loss of identity and orientation; an incapacity to assert one's will and to assume responsibility for one's fate and make independent choices for the self and the community. While Shariati's ultimate aim was the emancipation of the individual from all forms of oppression and his elevation to a free and moral being, the achievement of such an aim, he thought, would be possible only with and through the emancipation of the community. That in turn depended, beyond freedom from imperialist domination, on restructuring of the social order into a free, productive and "classless" society. Yet the emancipation of the community rested with neither fate nor accident. It was the responsibility of the individuals themselves. How could the individuals burdened with the condition of oppression become the agents of their own liberation? If one explained the passivity and indifference of the people by the totality of their existing condition, then emancipation either would be the work of fate or could only come from the outside. The task, then, was to identify and intervene in that which most directly and decisively impinged on the individuals as agents of their own freedom. Shariati sought to locate the particular sphere of life that shaped men's interpretation of their situation, their ideals for the future, and thus their response to the condition of their existence. That sphere was culture. In culture which he defined as "the

spiritual, intellectual, and moral accumulation of a people," Shariati found a source of justifying and perpetuating the condition of oppression as well as a means of enlightening and mobilizing people for emancipation.

Shariati identified two cultural forms in the Iranian society as the roots of vulnerability to and acceptance of oppression and as the prime sources of what he termed "ideological poverty." Both the culture of tradition, that is, the Islamic culture in its present atrophied form and the culture of "modernity" in its disfigured and imposed representation had made Iran into a stagnant yet chaotic society with a majority in deep slumber and a minority in flight. Iran suffered from imperialist domination, backwardness, disunity and dictatorship. Yet Iranians found themselves incapable of removing these ills because they were afflicted with an even greater malaise which produced and reproduced the ground condition for all other forms of oppression. They suffered from estehmar (stupefaction) brought about and perpetuated by tradition and modernity.

The principal reason for our distress is neither dictatorship nor imperialism or exploitation. It is stupefaction which has two forms: the old and the new.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time Shariati believed that these cultural forms could be transformed to produce a spirit of rebellion against oppression and be made the mainspring of an ideology of national emancipation.

#### A Critique of the Religious Tradition

Much of Shariati's works is devoted to the critique of tradition and modernity. He cited Shi'i religion as a main reason for

the presence of a spirit of weakness and abjectness in the Iranian people.<sup>7</sup> Religion as it was taught and practiced in the Iranian society paralyzed the mind rather than uplifted the soul.<sup>8</sup> It was indifferent and irrelevant to life in general and to social life in particular. Yet with all its irrelevance to social life, it performed the function of sanctifying misery and oppression. Belief in God's providence implied in theory and produced in practice the acceptance of things as they were. Everything was said to be in accordance with God's original design. Neither were the oppressor and exploiter guilty for their acts nor were the oppressed and the exploited responsible for their condition. The main principle of a such religion was to prepare the individual for the future life to which all ideals and hopes were relegated. The Quran which was to give guidance to life of the Muslims had been taken to the cemetery to soothe the soul of the dead and had been replaced by the prayer book. It is one of Shariati's interesting theses that a religion decays when its forms are retained while its content is either distorted or destroyed. This, he said, was precisely the condition of Shi'i Islam which had turned into lifeless sets of rituals. Shi'ism no longer meant the following of the 12 Imams and emulating their life examples but had been reduced to a mere sentiment often expressed in praising the Imams and cursing their enemies. The Imams themselves had been transfigured into supernatural and luminous beings only to be loved and worshipped but never understood. The fact that the Imams had been opposed and eventually martyred by the dominant powers of their time did not invite reflection but evoked only moaning and wailing. The only use that the Imams had was to intercede with God

was to intercede with God on behalf of the sick, the despondent and the sinner. Hossein, the third Shi'i imam had been martyred in struggle against injustice and tyranny but here they only pointed to the wounds of his body and wept over his innocence and defenselessness.<sup>9</sup> The Shi'i rituals gave expression to a sense of helplessness and impotence produced in the believer by the oppressive conditions of life and reinforced by the doctrine itself. They were rehearsals for impotence in social life. More than anything the belief in the Mahdi (messiah) and the expectation of his parousia was responsible for this state of affairs. According to the prevailing conception of the Mahdi, the world was doomed by God's ordinance to witness an ever increasing spread of corruption and social injustice. Thus, until the coming of Mahdi all efforts at reform were deemed to be futile. In sum, what Shi'ism in its present form taught was contentment in the face of misery, despair in the face of hardship, pessimism toward the future, and submissiveness and fear before authority.<sup>10</sup>

Shariati attacked the manifestations of religious decadence not only among the masses but also in the high culture of the clerical establishment. As a byproduct of the age of feudalism and political orders of the Caliphate and Sultanate<sup>11</sup>, the existing religion manifested itself in two ways in the ranks of the clerical leadership: Class corruption and narrow-mindedness. Some members of the clergy had become close allies of desoptic rulership and exploitative property and had, therefore, developed a vested interest in propagating a religion of stupefaction. For these clerics, religion was merely a source of "social prestige" and "economic livelihood."<sup>12</sup> Shariati pointed to the

strong relationship between the clergy and the bazaar in which "otherworldly salvation was exchanged for worldly gains."<sup>13</sup>

Despite Shariati's sweeping statements against the clergy, which can easily give rise to misunderstanding, he had a complex and discriminating view of the ulama.<sup>14</sup> Shariati expressed high regard for the "true and progressive" members of the ulama. Thus, he did not accuse the clergy as a whole of engaging in corrupt practices or the sale of religion for economic gains. Neither did Shariati consider all of the clerics responsible for propagating superstition among the masses. Nevertheless, Shariati viewed the clerical establishment in its dominant mode as the guardian of a dead and deadening tradition which manifested itself as unconscious faith and superstitious beliefs among the masses on the one hand, and as preoccupation with medieval ideas and social irresponsibility among the religious elite, on the other. The latter to whom was entrusted the guidance of the community remained largely ignorant of the realities of the contemporary world. Confined within the walls of the old seminaries, they studied and taught the so called "classical sciences" left-over from the medieval times and untouched by the currents of modern thought and science. They engaged in sectarian disputes, stale theological arguments and extensive commentaries on worn out texts. The Islamic principle of ijtihad (free inquiry), which had always kept the Islamic teachings alive, had been replaced by "clerical despotism," the natural response to which on the part of the lay believers was absolute taglid, or blind obedience to religious authorities.<sup>15</sup> For many of the ulama, religion was no more than a subjective belief and individual piety. What

remained was the outward signs of religiosity and an obsessive concern with a few ordinances concerning inconsequential aspects of individual and social life. The principle of "enjoining the good and forbidding the evil," a most vital Islamic idea, was employed, as it had been for centuries in the life of a metamorphosed Islam, to enforce the most trivial rules regarding individual behavior. Although it was the responsibility of the ulama to define the good and the evil at each given time and mobilize the believers in jihad against social ills, the greatest evils that afflicted the community and the people did not find a way even into their vocabulary. Despair and submissiveness of the Muslim masses found their counterpart, in the clergy, in the form of acquiescence in the face of social corruption, political oppression, and economic injustice. They justified their silence and abdication of social responsibility by resorting yet to another distorted Islamic concept: taqiyyeh (dissimulation).

As this moral and intellectual apparatus was incapable of facing new challenges and resolving new problems, with the intrusion of the modern world into Iran at the turn of the century and rapid change in the social order and values, the ulama took further refuge into the mosques and the madrasahs:

Modern civilization invaded the boundaries and ramparts of the old world and tore them asunder. The sharp currents of Renaissance, Enlightenment, the French Revolution, and industrial life...began to flow [and] changed the climate of the world. A change of climate in our society, too, was an unavoidable reality. It was certain that sooner or later the electricity, the printing press, university, "democracy", radio and television, science and newspaper, book and school, Western education and modern technology...would come. But those moral guardians of society responsible for society's ethics, life and thought closed their eyes to these inevitable realities and took to their fancied ideals and old illusions.<sup>16</sup>

Shariati credits the ulama for having sensed and anticipated the threat that Westernization would pose to the moral and spiritual health of the society and to Iran's independence. However, he criticizes them for not having confronted the challenge of modernity and for having failed to guide its direction. They failed to make Islam responsive to the needs of a changing situation and even helped suppress the movement for Islamic reform. They allowed Babism and Bahaism to become the standard bearers of "religious reform" and when the genuine movement for Islamic reform emerged, they opposed it and accused its leading founder, Afghani, of unbelief and of being in the service of the Christian Church.<sup>17</sup> Given the general condition of society and the failure of the ulama to initiate cultural renewal and provide moral leadership, it was natural that the more dynamic sectors of the population should turn away from the community and people and seek intellectual and practical guidance elsewhere outside Iran and Islam.

Nevertheless, Shariati finds a positive feature in the ulama's indifference and resistance to progress and development. Not one of them, he says, endorsed or signed the treaties which led to the subjugation of Iran.<sup>18</sup> It was through the modern intelligentsia that imperialism was able to make inroads into the Iranian society.

#### A Critique of Modernity

For Shariati, Iran's modern tragedy began when the new intelligentsia accepted the colonialist idea that "the wholesale adoption of the Western civilization was the only road to progress." Shariati makes repeated reference to Mirza Malkum Khan, a founder of the modern Iranian "enlightenment" at the turn of the century who

proposed the idea of "Western civilization without the Iranian intervention" as well as to Seyyed Hassan Taqizadeh, the intellectual politician who prided himself as having been the first Iranian to suggest that "we must become Westernized body and soul."<sup>19</sup>

According to Shariati what these intellectuals imported into their society was not civilization but modernity which in his view is only a Trojan Horse of Western imperialism. Shariati considers it as paramount that the Muslim intellectuals after a century of confusion come to recognize the difference and even contradiction between modernity and civilization. He defines civilization as a capacity for intellectual and material production and "a high level in society's cultural and spiritual growth and an elevated state of human spirit and outlook."<sup>20</sup> As such civilization involves conscious acts of self generation, choice and creative adoption. It could be neither mimicked nor imposed. Shariati believed that a nation could partake of the civilizational process only on the foundation of its own past and present cultural achievements. By contrast, Shariati views modernization as a process whereby whole peoples and societies made total rupture with their history and culture and acquired values and life-styles geared to the consumption of Western material and cultural products.<sup>21</sup> Shariati insists that modernity is not an accident of history or pseudomorphosis of Western civilization in the East but a product of Western imperialism consciously designed to stifle the development of culture and civilization in the East. If the non-Western nations were to become consumers of the West, it was necessary that they lost faith in their own capacity to produce

cultural and material values. They were to believe that they had never produced culture and civilization or if they had in some distant past, they could no longer. Thus, Western thinkers and spokesmen invented and propagated the myth that there was one culture and one civilization developed and perfected in the West.

The alternative before the non-western peoples was either to adopt the culture and the civilization of the West or to remain in a savage state.<sup>22</sup> The parochial culture of the West was, then, promoted as "the universal and the perfect" and the Western race as the "superior type that possessed all human virtues and capacities." As for the Western thinker, his opinion was to be thought of as the measure of truth and his behavior as the criterion of right conduct.<sup>23</sup> He represented the supreme culture, the supreme religion, and the supreme civilization. All others were mere superstitions to be discarded.<sup>24</sup> But the West did not, Shariati argues, suffice with a false representation of its own culture and it did not simply discard the relevance of non-Western cultures. Rather, the Western thinkers took an active interest in the history, culture, and religion of the East only to reconstruct and represent them in such a way that the native intellectuals would turn away in horror and disgust.<sup>25</sup> The aim of cultural colonialism has been to create a deculturated individual without roots in his society and emptied of all historical and cultural content yearning to be filled with meaning and substance by the West.<sup>26</sup> But the meaning and substance of the new individual were to be no more than a Western life-style and a craving for all things Western. This, for Shariati, is the essence of modernity. In

fact, the culture of modernity was not a genuine culture at all. It was neither authentically Western nor Eastern and Iranian. Because of its parasitic nature, modernity lacked a creative content. It could neither recreate and reconstruct the Irano-Islamic values nor reproduce the Western values or Western science and technology. Unlike an authentic culture, modernity did not give the affected person a sense of selfhood but in fact depersonalized him because it severed the individual from all that bestowed character on individual personality, namely, history, culture, and religion.<sup>27</sup> The modernized individual was a person in flight from himself and from his society. He was the epitome of personal and cultural alienation. Thus, modernity had a disintegrative function also in the sense that it created a deep chasm in society between the vast majority who still lived in the past and valued traditional culture and religion and a minority that was dislocated and devalued everything in its culture and religion.

Shariati divided the Iranian society into two primary groups which he described as a majority in deep slumber and a minority in frenzied flight. The task, he said, was to awaken the first group and to prevent the flight of the latter. Of course, Shariati saw the problem of tradition and modernity as too deep rooted a problem to be solved by mere criticism. His critique was directed at a particular audience, that is, "the responsible intellectual" whose awakening he thought to be the key to the solution of the problem. Shariati divided the modernized sector of the population into three groups. The first group consisted of what he labeled as "the consumptionist assimile." This type was characterized by a mindless imitation of the West, a

total incapacity for independent thought and judgment, and by a complete lack of a sense of social responsibility. The second group consisted of licensed "pseudo-intellectuals," namely, the professionals who were trained to operate the industrial and administrative machinery of the modernizing society. The majority of these intellectuals were the willing functionaries of imperialism ("right men for the job").<sup>28</sup> However, it was the third group whose Westernization Shariati lamented and considered the most serious:

Our great misfortune is not the consumptionist assimile or even the educated professionals who are assimile. The great tragedy is the assimilation of the intellectuals, namely thinkers who have responsibility for directing social ideas and for guiding society's spirit, culture, and faith; those who are [potential] successors to religious leaders and are to be counsel to social and political leaders in our society.<sup>29</sup>

The intellectual has a supreme place in Shariati's thought. The intellectuals, he contends, are heirs to the prophets. The enlightened intellectual is he who is endowed with a kind of knowledge that gives people self-awareness, thus transforming them from stagnant beings into dynamic and creative spirits. It is from this awakened consciousness that springs the will to culture and civilization.<sup>30</sup> Yet because of the culture of modernity the principal problem of the Iranian society had become the reeducation of the intellectuals. "Our basic problem" Shariati wrote, "is not the illiteracy of the common people but the half-literacy of our intellectuals."<sup>31</sup>

A hallmark of the modernized intellectual in Iranian society was a "misconception of social time." The Iranian intellectual lived in a country that had the characteristics of the fourteenth century but he took his ideas, thoughts, and sentiments from nineteenth and twentieth

century Europe. Thus, he conceived of problems that did not exist in his own society, proposed solutions that were irrelevant to it, and felt pains that he did not experience in real life. He lived under an economic system that was primarily agricultural and could not even produce sufficient food for its people yet he was afflicted with pains of a well-fed and automated society. He lacked the basic means of daily transportation but complained of the evils of technology and bureaucracy and suffered from Kafkaesque modes of alienation. He came from centuries of stagnation but he expressed the philosophical pessimism of the Europeans of the postwar generation and represented that pessimism in his arts, literature and ideology. The most serious consequence of the intellectual's misreading of social time was his misplaced secularism and antireligiosity which only antagonized the common people and strengthened the hold of fanaticism and reaction over them.<sup>32</sup>

#### The Need For the Reconstruction of Islamic Shi'i Thought

Shariati believed that both the culture of tradition and the culture of modernity had contributed to social decay and spiritual poverty: first, by perpetuating stifling religious ideas and second, by draining creative intellectual energy from society. Yet, cultures of tradition and modernity were, in his view, the atrophied and distorted representations of two higher forms of culture and civilization neither of which could be discarded: The Islamic culture and the culture of the West. Shariati made a distinction between the truth and the reality of Islam, between its essence and its appearance,

a distinction at once Islamic and Western. The true Islam had produced and still could produce a culture conducive to progress and freedom while Islam as it existed in reality was an obstacle to human progress and a fetter on human liberation. With regard to the culture of the West, despite Shariati's virulent attack on the West and its particular manifestation in the Iranian society, he did not reject the Western culture in toto or even the idea of adopting "Western civilization." The Muslims could learn a great deal from the West but the most important lesson, one with a decisive significance for them, was to learn the underlying logic of progress in the history of the West. The purpose of such learning should be to creatively apply that logic to their own specific situation.

The concept of "social time" has an important place in Shariati's attempt to link the logic of Western progress with the requirement of social development in Iranian society. A most basic question facing the intellectuals in Iran and other Islamic societies, he said, was to determine "in what period of history are we situated." Shariati's own answer to the question was as unequivocal as it was curious: If we were to compare ourselves with the West in a similar scale of historical development, the Iranian society must be regarded at the end of medieval society at the threshold of a transformation similar to what the West experienced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>33</sup> Of course Shariati did not intend this to be an actual characterization of the Iranian society for in his "sociological" description of Iran he does take into account the modern 20th century features and recognizes "the mosaic" or multistructural character of

the Iranian society. What prompts Shariati to such a characterization and comparison is the all permeating influence of religion in the social life of the vast majority and its negative role in social development. Given this basic condition, what could the Iranians learn from the West and the "logic" of its progress?

The nineteenth century Iranian intellectuals had found the secret of the West in science and technology as well as in ideas of secularism, nationalism, and the government of law. In Shariati's view, such estimation had been misguided and based on a superficial and ahistorical understanding of the West. Even worse was the attempt to apply such ideas to a society at a different stage of historical development. To Shariati, the central intellectual factor that led to the development of the new civilization and "transformed Europe from a stagnant society into a dynamic one was the religious revolution of Protestantism." Shariati was familiar with the social and intellectual history of Europe and he presents a good description and analysis of the relevant features of medieval and post-medieval European society. One of his most important observations is that the European intellectuals in the sixteenth century did not abandon or negate religion but instead transformed religion into a creed oriented to the world, to society and to work and construction. It was Shariati's conclusion that in the present condition of Iranian society it was not Rousseau or Marx that were of critical relevance but the forerunners of the Renaissance and the Reformation:

If we recognize the value of the work of reformers such as Luther and Calvin in the West, and examine the protestant movement for religious reform which liberated Christianity from a petrified and decadent Catholicism and appreciate the role of this movement

in European awakening and progress, we will come to the conclusion that today our own society and religion needs such protesting Islamic reformers.<sup>34</sup>

Shariati regarded many of the past reforms and reform proposals in Iran as landmarks in a long history of "treading on the wrong tracks."<sup>35</sup> The Iranian intellectuals had thought that by importing ideas, instruments and institutions from the West and by changing people's manners, life-style or their alphabets, they could initiate a self-generating and self-sustaining process of change in Iran. The result had been repeated failures and disappointments. The time had come for the intellectuals to recognize the centrality of Islam in the life and culture of their society. The common people remained indifferent and hostile to any reform that proved to be indifferent and hostile to religion.<sup>36</sup> To believe that one could implement social ideals in an Islamic society in negation or denial of religion was "an impossible ideal" and even worse a form of "superstition."<sup>37</sup> The serious and plausible task for the responsible intellectual was to begin a process of religious reform:

Let us change the perception, meaning and justification of religion in society; to transform a religion which is a factor of decay, stagnation and decline into a dynamic and constructive factor. Given the influence of religion in society [we will be able to] mobilize the creativity of the social forces and direct them toward construction, advancement, and justice.<sup>38</sup>

Shariati called his project for religious reform variably as Islamic Renaissance and Islamic protestantism but his favorite term was a phrase of Muhammad Iqbal and the title of the latter's most important work, "the reconstruction of religious thought." The purpose of such reconstruction was to initiate a long-term process of cultural renewal and creativity in Iranian society in, which the intellectuals having

thoroughly assimilated their religious and cultural heritage, would render that heritage, by way of selection and refinement, responsive to the needs of the time and requirements of social development. Shariati thought the reorientation of the intellectual and reconstruction of religious ideas to be the essential elements of a workable solution to the problem of cultural dualism which had "caused the breakdown of social unity and the separation of society's heart from its brain."<sup>39</sup>

#### Shariati and the Reform Oriented Clergy

It was a central aim of Shariati's project for Islamic reform to bring together the Islamic intellectuals and reform oriented clerics for the purpose of cooperation. The intellectual-clergy cooperation was not without precedence in Iran and in fact by the time Shariati established himself as a religious thinker and author in the mid sixties it was witnessing a boom. The most important center of this cooperation was Hosseiniyyeh Ershad, the Islamic educational center that Shariati later joined and to which he gave a new direction. This upsurge in clergy-intellectual cooperation was the result of two landmark events in the history of religious change in Iran. The first was the 1961 religious political uprising led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in which the young Iranians witnessed for the first time the mobilizing power of religion and religious leadership. The second was the clerical movement for reform also inaugurated in 1961. The aim of this reform movement was to effect change in the organization and the curriculum of the theological seminaries or madrasahs in order to orient their activities and teachings to the problems of society. The central concern of the participants in the movement was to provide

ideological guidance and leadership to the young Iranians who seemed to become rapidly distant from religion.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Iran in the early and mid sixties witnessed a new level of religious activities as well as an outpouring of books and periodicals aimed at demonstrating the relevance of religion to social life. Two features of the movement should be noted here. First, it was a traditionalist movement in the sense that it did not involve any rethinking or reinterpretation of Islamic ideas but only a shift of emphasis from purely religious to social issues as well as a change in the style of presentation. Second, the clergy provided the leadership as well as doctrinal direction of these activities. As Arjomand has noted, the lay religious intellectuals who joined these activities "constituted the followers and not the leaders, the consumers and not the producers, of the traditionalist ideology."<sup>41</sup> Shariati's idea of reform was both more substantial and more democratic.

Although Shariati did not totally dismiss the traditional religious disciplines taught in the madrasahs, he did not believe they could provide the methods or the primary materials for the reconstruction of religious thought. Many of the traditional sciences such as kalam, Rijal, and fiqh, could be usefully employed, Shariati believed, only when the orientation and the framework of the true Islam had been determined and established. As they existed, the traditional sciences included elements of medieval thinking as well as un-Islamic accretions that made them unsuitable means for a genuine understanding of Islam. They had to be subjected to a critical reevaluation and reconstruction in light of the Quran and the (authentic) tradition of

the Prophet. Although one can find statements by Shariati to the contrary,<sup>42</sup> there is overwhelming evidence from Shariati's works as well as his practice that he believed that the clerical institution could not be a springboard from which to launch religious reform. Even the progressive and reform minded clerics whose guidance, presence and cooperation Shariati desired and welcomed could not, in his view, lead a substantive movement for reform due to their background and commitment. Shariati viewed much of the clerical efforts at reintroduction of Islam either as "modernism" which he dismissed or reformism which he deemed as seriously inadequate. By modernism Shariati meant the attempt to extract from the sacred texts explanation of the modern developments in the social and scientific fields. Shariati believed religious reformism to be too gradual and insubstantial to produce significant results. Reformism, in his view was the attempt "to give a proportionate shape to an undesirable phenomenon rather than supplanting it."<sup>43</sup> Besides reformism, Shariati identified two other modes of approach to religious tradition which he also ruled out: conservatism which wanted to retain the tradition in both form and substance and revolutionism which tried to get rid everything and at once.

Shariati favored a fifth approach to religious tradition that might be described as revolutionary reform. This, in Shariati's view, had been the method of the Prophet Muhammad. He describes this method as one of retaining the traditional forms with some improvement while at the same time revolutionizing the content.<sup>44</sup> In Shariati's opinion, only the intellectual Islamologists thoroughly committed to Islam but

without vested interest in preserving the tradition at any cost could initiate and carry out such a revolutionary reform. It was of no relevance whether these intellectuals were lay or clerical but Shariati's requirement that they be fully acquainted with modern scientific methods and ideas shifted the balance decidedly in favor of the Muslim intellectuals with a modern education like himself. The serious problem with such a view was that only Islamologists trained in the traditional Islamic sciences, that is, the ulama had the right and the permission to express views on Islamic ideas and doctrine. To formulate new ideas about Islam and put them to public debate and discussion required an atmosphere of intellectual freedom beyond what was permissible for the legitimate guardians of the religious tradition. To overcome that obstacle Shariati called for the revival of the spirit of Ijtihad (translated variably as free inquiry, independent judgment or original thinking) in Shi'i Islam.

#### The Right to Ijtihad

Ordinarily, a Shi'i Muslim does not ask for the revival of ijtihad because unlike Sunni Islam in which "the gate" of ijtihad is said to have become closed with the formation of the four Sunni school of law in the tenth century, in Shi'i Islam Ijtihad is open, a fact which is said to make Shi'ism a dynamic religion in the sense that the principle of ijtihad enables the Shi'is to interpret Islamic laws and doctrines to meet the requirements of changing circumstances.<sup>45</sup> However, for centuries the practice of ijtihad has been limited to socially inconsequential matters of personal laws and rituals. Taking note of this fact Mehdi Bazargan, the only lay religious intellectual

to participate in the clerical reform movement of the early sixties, exhorted the Shi'i ulama to employ this prerogative and expand the principle of ijtihad to include judgments on vital issues of concern to the Shi'i community.<sup>46</sup> The need for revival of ijtihad was one among several ideas that Shariati adopted from the clerical movement to which he gave new meaning and direction.

Shariati elevated ijtihad to the position of a central concept in the study of Islam. He called it the principle of "permanent revolution" in Islam in the sense that its application made it possible to constantly renew Islamic ideals and societies.<sup>47</sup> The reason for intellectual and social stagnation of Islamic society, Shariati said, was "the death of the spirit of ijtihad."<sup>48</sup> Strictly speaking ijtihad is a legal and jurisprudential concept. It is "the search for a correct opinion in the deducing of the specific provisions of the law from its principles and ordinances."<sup>49</sup> In order to be able to practice it a person must become a mujtahid, that is one who has attained both expertise in Islamic law and permission from authoritative persons and institutions. However, there is another form of ijtihad, scarcely stated or elaborated, that relates to questions of doctrinal beliefs and ethical principles. Although there is no prerequisite "license" to practice this kind of ijtihad, it is expected and required that a person undergoes rigorous training in an Islamic institution before he ventures ideas that are different from those of accepted authorities. Noting the distinction between the two forms of ijtihad, Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, a leading participant in the clerical reform movement, considers it the task of Islamic institutions to train

experts in both fields.<sup>50</sup> He also expresses serious dismay at what he considers "the grave deviation" in recent times:

in particular among those educated in other fields that with a little knowledge of The Quran, the hadith, and Islamic sciences, to allow themselves to make judgments on practical jurisprudential matters and express opinion in doctrinal and historical questions and at times they even go as far as to repudiate the great Islamic scientists of the past or present (emphasis added).<sup>51</sup>

It was this latter form of ijtihad that was of particular interest and relevance to Shariati. He called it "intellectual" as distinct from jurisprudential ijtihad and considered it the right and the duty of every Muslim committed to Islam and knowledgeable about the Quran, the authentic hadith, and the Islamic history to express his/her views and put forward his/her interpretations of Islamic ideals. In Shariati's view, this form of ijtihad did not require training in the disciplines of the madrasah or permission of the clerical authorities.<sup>52</sup> It was in line with this conception that Shariati himself freely practiced intellectual Ijtihad and inspired and encouraged others to do so. Such freethinking brought severe opposition from the traditional clerics and even became a constant source of tension and conflict between Shariati and his clerical friends and colleagues such as Ayatollahs Morteza Motahhari and Ali Khamene'i.<sup>53</sup> In his practice of ijtihad Shariati reinterpreted many concepts and ideas that had traditionally been the themes for kalam (theology) and akhlagh (ethics). He gave such themes as divine unity and justice, ma'ad (return to God), and Imamat, which had been either passive principles of beliefs or subjects for academic debate, a dynamic content and activist orientation. However, it must be said

that traditionally it is the law not theology or ethics that is considered as the most important branch of the Islamic disciplines. It is within the sphere of Islamic law that the crucial issues of public authority, personal and social property, and issues of civil and criminal rights are decided. It should seem impossible to consider the reconstruction of Islamic thought without formulating definite views about Islamic law and the methods and direction of the way in which it is interpreted. Indeed, Shariati did have a definite, if poorly elaborated, perspective concerning the place of fiqh and the the extent of the authority of the faqih in Islam. But, the question of Islamic law and the ways of interpreting it remained of marginal interest to Shariati and his design for Islamic reform. This was not due to a consideration of fiqh's insignificance on Shariati's part but rather to his general conception of Islam. To Shariati the most central aspects of Islam were its world view and ethical orientation in reference to which Islamic precepts on practical affairs of politics and economy ought to be worked out. The view that the practical ordinances of Islam should be subordinate to Islam's vision of God, man, and society, although never neatly formulated by Shariati, permeates all of his works. This is a theme that we will take up in chapter 7 because it has important implications for Shariati's view of an Islamic social order as well as for his hypothetical view of a government of Islamic jurists (velayat-e faqih) such as exists in Iran today. I should only note here that Shariati's idea of Islamic reform had a democratic character in the sense that all committed Muslim intellectuals, lay or clerical, would become the legitimate interpreters and guardians of the

Islamic faith.

Shariati and the Tradition of  
of Islamic Reform

The idea of Islamic reform and reinterpretation of Islamic teachings in terms of contemporary thought, although a daring introduction to Shi'i Islam, has had a long history in the Islamic world beginning in mid-nineteenth century. Faced with the disintegration of the Islamic community in the wake of European expansion and awakened to the backwardness of Islamic societies, some Muslim thinkers began the attempt to revive Islam as a symbol of Muslim steadfastness and unity against European imperialism as well as to adopt Islamic teachings to the requirements of modern civilization. The founders of the movement and its most outstanding representatives were Seyyed Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (183-1897) and Shaykh Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905). Although their vision of Islamic reform was discontinued by their successors and replaced by varieties of Occidentalism and Islamic revivalism, the idea of religious reform did not cease to inspire great Muslim intellectuals such as Muhammad Iqbal (1875-1938) of Pakistan, a man of great insight who deeply felt and understood the historical necessity of reform in Islamic thought. Yet, by the time that Shariati began his intellectual career the tradition of Islamic reform begun by Afghani and Abduh and continued by Iqbal had become as good as intellectual history with the reformers as important figures mainly to be remembered and appreciated. But Shariati saw Afghani, Abduh, and Iqbal as great precursors of an intellectual movement on a historical scale whose work was to be continued. He viewed the

shortcomings of the movement as the inevitable outcome of all great beginnings and appraised the slow progress of reform efforts with a view to the centuries of intellectual stagnation. It was this tradition that Shariati exalted and wished to build on in the context of Shi'i Islam. In it Shariati saw the essential elements of a genuine and effective movement for Islamic reform. In particular, Shariati praised two features of the movement, namely the call "to return to the Quran" and the readiness to adopt all the "progressive elements of modern civilization" for the reconstruction of Islamic thought and society.<sup>54</sup>

Shariati's relation to the reform tradition founded by Afghani and Abduh was one of critical appreciation. His critique of Afghani and Abduh is brief but significant and incisive. His criticism is not so much of particular ideas but of general orientation. It underlines and points to the necessity for a radical shift in the orientation of Islamic reform from that of building political movements and ethical and philosophical systems to one of reconstructing Islam as a full-fledged ideology. Shariati cites the political and intellectual elitism of the early reform efforts as the main reason for the failure of the movement and why Islam "did not penetrate the lower depths of societies and failed to arouse the Muslim masses."<sup>55</sup> In Shariati's account, while Afghani immersed himself in diplomatic and political activities and thus neglected the intellectual and the ideological work, Abduh, unable to go beyond his professional status as an Islamic expert confined much of his work among the ulama who, in Shariati's view, were the products as well as the beneficiaries of the same social

order as the statesmen and thus could never commit themselves to revolutionary reform.<sup>56</sup> Both Afghani and Abduh worked to effect change from above while "it is necessary to awaken the people and begin a revolutionary movement from their midst." Another dimension of Shariati's critique concerns the conception of early reformers, especially Abduh, of the relation between Islam and science. Although Shariati absolves Abduh of the naive attempt to find the Quranic substantiation of modern sciences, he has nothing but scorn for his later imitators, then proliferating in Iran, who tried hard to make the Quran into an index to scientific discoveries. The Quran, Shariati maintains, is not a book of science or philosophy but the intellectual mainspring for the ideology of the emancipation of the oppressed.<sup>57</sup>

Among the reformers, it is with Iqbal that Shariati has the most affinity. Unlike Abduh and Afghani but like Shariati Iqbal had primarily a European education with little training in traditional Islamic disciplines. Like Shariati's Third World models Fanon, Umar Ozgan, and Nyerere, Iqbal was actively involved in the popular colonial struggles of his time. Whereas Afghani and Abduh belonged to the liberal age of the Islamic world and were much inspired by Western ideas and ideals, Iqbal belonged to the epoch of the Russian Revolution, the beginning of mass politics in the Third World, and the formation of liberation ideologies such as Negritude, Gandhism, and Chinese Communism. He was disenchanted with the Western liberalism and was profoundly inspired by the socialist ideals of equality and justice. Although Iqbal did not use the term ideology and had a philosophical approach to Islamic reform, Shariati saw in Iqbal's works

the elements of a systematic and creative reinterpretation of Islam which went beyond the modernization of selected Islamic ideas.

Shariati derived a number of important ideas from Iqbal including the latter's characterization of ijtihad as a "principle of movement" in Islam. To Shariati Iqbal was a reformer who grasped the spirit of the age. He was the ideological father of the Islamic reformation in the twentieth century. Iqbal's principal aim, according to Shariati, was "to change Islam from a personal belief, a spiritual motive and an ethical system...into an ideology encompassing all the dimensions of human existence and society's material and spiritual life."<sup>5</sup>

Three Sources for the Study  
of Islam as Ideology

To Shariati Islamic renaissance and the transformation of Islam into an ideology were one and the same thing because Islam had originally been "a call," a mission for the reconstruction of man and society. Shariati locates the beginning of the demise of Islam not in the advent of Western colonialism or even the invasions of Asiatic hordes and the Crusaders, but in the Golden Age of Islam when Islam had gradually become transformed from a revolutionary ideology "into a glorious center of culture and civilization without mission."<sup>59</sup>

... What is the source of great pride for us in Islamic history is not the civilization of the 11th century or the power and the expanse of the abode of Islam or even the bulk of culture, philosophy, and knowledge produced in the past under such labels. What is instructive and intensely inspiring and at the same time constitutes the heart of Islam and its mission is the revolutionary transformation of values, of human beings, and [their] relations; the creation of great and pure spirits; ... of a new understanding of the world, human life, and history which emerged in the first half century of Islam especially the first quarter of the Islamic century...<sup>60</sup>

Shariati made a persistent distinction between Islam as a culture and Islam as an ideology. He did not deny the existence of the elements of Islamic ideology in the bulk of knowledge known as Islamic culture, that is, philosophy, theology, arts and the sciences; he made use of them insofar as his knowledge of that tradition permitted him. Neither did Shariati underestimate the worth and value of Islam's past cultural attainments and their relevance for the cultural progress of Muslim Iranians. The main question for Shariati was at what point Islamic culture, for example, in the philosophy of an Avicenna, the mysticism of a Hallaj or the theology of a Majlesi deviated from the basic ideological orientation of Islam. Although the study and evaluation of various aspects of Islamic culture were integral to the renaissance of Islam, the more urgent task was to rediscover the ideological core of Islam which would enable the Muslim intellectuals to make judgment as to whether an Ibn Khaldun or a Hallaj, for example, were of purely historical interest or of contemporary relevance, a source of passive pride or of active contribution to the reconstruction of self and society. To establish the ideological orientation of Islam, Shariati suggested that in addition to the Quran and the authentic tradition of the Prophet, the study of Islamic "models of man" in the personalities of the Imams, the select companions of the Prophet, and the Imams' followers and disciples should be included as the means of understanding Islam as ideology. "The personalities and movements of the first [Islamic] century" Shariati writes "have an ideological feature" while in later centuries they are replaced with individuals and tendencies thoroughly steeped in intellectual concerns

and devoid of Islam's ideological thrust and commitment.<sup>61</sup> To study the life and thought of such personalities as Ali, Fatemeh, Hossein, Abuzar, and Salman Farsi was to know "manifest Islam, objective Islam" without the dubious mediation of Islamic philosophy and theology.<sup>62</sup> Shariati viewed the preoccupation of Muslim scholars with philosophy as an extension of European prejudice that Islamic classical philosophy was the only thing worthy of consideration in Islam. To counter this orientation Shariati went so far as to declare that "For the contemporary Muslim society" which he described as a living corpse in need of spirit, "an Abuzar has a more urgent and life-giving value than hundreds of Mulla Sadras and Avicennas."<sup>63</sup> The central argument of Shariati for the study and presentation of Islam through the lives of its precursors and progenies was that it would reveal Islam at its ideological peak and, unlike Islamic philosophy, it would be comprehensible to both the elite and the common people as well as providing a strong link between them.

If we were to give a synopsis of Shariati's vision of Islamic renaissance, it would be something like the following: a collective project for the reconstruction of Shi'i Islam as ideology of social change. Shariati's own works were intended to be a contribution to that goal.

## CHAPTER 2

### NOTES

1. This conception of Shariati's central concern is based on his own interpretation of the central mission of Islam which is the liberation of the mostz'fan (the Quranic term meaning deemed weak, disinherited, and oppressed) from all forms of oppression. Shariati compares the Quranic phrase "disinherited in the land" favorably with Fanon's "wretched of the earth" and considers the Quranic term the more universal and inclusive of the two. See his Collected Works, Vol. 7: Hajj [The Pilgrimage to Mecca] (n.p.: The Institute for editing and publication of Shariati's works [hereafter Institute], 1978, PP. 133-144.

2. The more obvious examples are the following titles. Abdulaziz Sachedina, "Ali Shariati: The Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," in Voices of Resurgent Islam, ed. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) and Ervand Abrahamian, "Ali Shariati: The Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution," MERIP Reports. 12: 1 (January 1982), PP. 24-28.

3. Ali Shariati, Collected Works (hereafter CW) Vol. 5: Iqbal and Ourselves (n.p.: Institute, 1978), P.42.

4. Shariati, The Responsibility of the Intellectual for the Construction of Society (Tehran: Ershad, 1970). Reproduced by the Union of the Islamic Student Associations in Europe, P. 16.

5. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return (n.p.: Institute, 1978), P.95.

6. Ibid., P. 39.

7. Shariati cites other components of the Iranian culture such as literature (poetry) and Sufism also as responsible for the malformation of the Iran's "social personality." See Shariati, CW, Vol.1: To the Familiar Audience, (n.p.: Institute, 1978), P. 15.

8. Critique of popular Shi'ism is scattered throughout Shariati's works. For a concise account see CW. Vol. 22: Religion Against Religion (Tehran: Sabz, 1982), PP. 55- 170.

9. Shariati, CW, Vol. 7: Shi'ism (n.p.: Institute, 1978), P. 10.

10. Shariati, To the Familiar, PP. 236-237.
11. Ibid., P. 227.
12. Shariati, CW, Vol. 27: Recognition of the Irano-Islamic Identity (Tehran: Elham, 1982), P. 229. See also Egbal, P. 225.
13. Shariati, "The Curve of the Social Class" [tape]. Reproduced by Free Islamic Literature, Houston, Texas.
14. Shariati, The Unjust, the Disobedient, and the Faithless (Tehran: Qalam, 1977), P. 241.
15. Shariati, CW, Vol. 5: Iqbal, P. 224. Shariati has adopted the term "clerical despotism" from Ayatollah Mohammad Hossein Na'ini (1860-1936), the great Shi'i theologian and the author of an important treatise on Islamic justification of parliamentary democracy.
16. Shariati, CW, Vol. 21: Woman (Tehran: Sabz, 1983), PP. 63- 64.
17. Ibid., PP. 66-7.
18. Shariati, CW, Vol. 5: Iqbal, P. 140.
19. Quoted by Shariati in The Pyramid in Cultural Sociology. (Tehran: Ershad, n.d.), P. 11.
20. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return, P. 140.
21. Shariati, CW, Vol. 25: Man Without Self (Tehran: Qalam, 1982), P.338.
22. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return, PP. 13-14. The idea of "one civilization" was also expressed by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, the founder of Modern Turkey, who said, "Countries are many but civilization is one and for progress of the nation it is necessary to participate in this one civilization." Quoted by Mary Matossian in "The Ideologies of Delayed Industrialization" in Political Development and Social Change. eds. John L. Finkle and Richard W. Gable (New York: John Wiley, 1971), P. 117.
23. Shariati, CW, Vol. 25: Man Without Self, P. 342.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., PP. 278-79.
26. Ibid., P. 342.
27. Ibid., PP. 268-9.
28. Shariati, CW, Vol. 5: Iqbal, P. 146.

29. Ibid., PP. 268-9.
30. Shariati, What is to be Done?, (Tehran: Ershad, n.d.). P. 41.
31. Shariati, CW, Vol. 5: Iqbal, P. 122.
32. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return, P. 97.
33. Shariati, From Where Shall We Begin? (Tehran: Ershad, n.d.), P.41.
34. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return, P. 104.
35. Shariati, From Where, P. 24.
36. Ibid.
37. Shariati, CW, Vol. 31: Characteristics, P. 115.
38. Ibid., P. 116.
39. Shariati, What is to be Done?, P. 97.
40. For an account of the clerical reform movement see Shahrokh Akhavi, Religion and Politics in Contemporary Iran: Clergy- State Relations in the Pahlavi Period (New York: State University of New York Press, 1980), PP. 117-128.
41. Said Amir Arjomand, "Traditionalism in Twentieth Century Iran" in From nationalism to Revolutionary Islam, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State university of New York, 1984), P.220.
42. Shariati, The Unjust, PP. 243-44.
43. Shariati, CW, Vol. 21: Woman, P. 550.
44. Ibid., P. 52.
45. Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (Austin: University of Texas Press), P. 168.
46. Mehdi Bazargan, "The Expectations of the People from the Models of Emulation" in A discourse on Marja'iyyat and the Clergy [in Persian] (Tehran: Enteshar, 1962), P. 109.
47. Shariati, CW, Vol. 17: Islamology II (Tehran: Qalam, 1983), PP. 63-4.
48. Shariati, What is to be Done?, P. 69.
49. Mohammad Sangalaji, Qaza Dar Islam (1959). Quoted by Hamid

Algar in Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), P. 150. Note 4.

50. Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, "Clergy in Islam and among Muslims," in A Discourse, P. 156.
51. Ibid., P. 158.
52. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 66.
53. The statements by Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i and Morteza Motahhari are made in "Bahs-e Chahar Nafareh" (The Debate of Four). On tape. Distributed by Free Islamic Literature. Houston: Texas.
54. Shariati, CW, Vol. 27: Recognition, P. 243.
55. Ibid., P. 241.
56. Shariati, "Let us Arise and Advance" in Islamology: Lectures 5-7. Reproduced by the Union of Islamic Student Associations in Europe, P. 70.
57. Ibid. See also Recognition, P. 243.
58. Shariati, CW, Vol. 7: Shi'ism, P. 306.
59. Shariati, Iqbal, P. 154.
60. Shariati, Recognition, P. 145.
61. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 204
62. Shariati, Recognition, P. 145.
63. Shariati, CW, Vol. 18: Islamology III (Tehran: Elham, 1982), P. 50.
64. Ibid.

## CHAPTER III

### TOWARDS IDEOLOGY

As a student of sociology Shariati was familiar with the "end of ideology" debate of the 1950's and the 1960's in the West. He admitted the "nonideological" character of the mainstream intellectual discourse in modern Western thought. However, he viewed this development not as a mark of progress but of "great decay," in contrast with the earlier periods in Western history when intellectuals had made great contributions to the formulation and realization of human ideals.<sup>1</sup> While the issue of faith and ideology was far from resolved in the West, the established economic and political powers, under the guise of scientism and scientific neutrality, had succeeded for the time being in employing science and intellect in the service of their interests.<sup>2</sup> In raising this issue Shariati's purpose was not to contribute to an academic debate but to hit at the source of the illusion, nurtured by the Iranian intellectual and technocratic elite that in the age of technological supremacy belief and ideology had become outmoded and irrelevant and that "it was through science and technology that a progressive and free society could be created."<sup>3</sup> To Shariati, it was the worst kind of parodying to maintain that the imitation of Western science and technology could bring about ends and ideals that had been neither consciously envisioned nor actively sought. In a society that

was in need of fundamental change ("the destruction of that which is imposed on us and its replacement by that which we ourselves desire") these technocrats resorted to scientism only to justify their own intellectual impotence and lack of vision. Fundamental change required before all else the ability to project meaningful ideals for one's society and to inspire faith as well as to generate movement for their realization. It was not science or technology but ideology that fulfilled these essential requirements:

It is vision, awareness and ideological knowledge that give life and movement to a society. Importation of science and industry into a society without conviction and without an ideology is like planting great fruit-bearing trees in a barren land and in the wrong season.<sup>4</sup>

Shariati pointed to the experience of certain Third World countries, Cuba and China in particular, to demonstrate the generative power of ideology. These countries, which had been burdened with centuries of backwardness and oppression, "following [the formation] of a national or class ideology were able to make earthly resurrection and in a period of less than fifty years attained a high level of progress, power and civilization."<sup>5</sup>

Shariati tries to ground his argument for the central role of ideology in social change not only in the experience of contemporary Third World societies but in history and theory as well. In his view, ideology is not a recent phenomenon as many a sociologist would argue, but a cultural form existing in all human societies and responsible for all great historical transformations. In Shariati's words, ideology is "the messiah of all ages."<sup>6</sup> Prophetic movements which gave birth to great cultures and civilizations were, above all, ideological

movements. On the basis of their new world view and new ideals for humanity, the prophets created new social order and prepared the condition for the emergence of science, arts, philosophy, etc.<sup>7</sup> How else could one explain the rise of Islamic civilization on the foundation of a religion originating in a society as backward as seventh century Arabia?<sup>8</sup> As ideologies, great religions set forth new ideals for human societies and inspired faith and commitment toward their realization. However, as they changed into established traditions and became symbols of collective identity, religions became a hindrance to the movement of human progress. This was true of medieval Christianity as it had been true of Islam for the past several centuries.

Although subject to periodical upsurge and decline, ideology is a perennial feature of human existence. Shariati cites Georges Gurvitch and other sociologists as having identified several forms of consciousness as various manifestations of human culture. However, Shariati contends that these thinkers have neglected to include the most important form: Ideology. Like science, philosophy, arts, religion, and politics, ideology should be regarded as a specific form of human consciousness with a very unique function in human affairs. While other forms merely contribute to understanding and reconstruction of social reality, the distinctive character of ideology is that it points beyond a given social order and to the creation of a new one. Shariati makes a number of repetitious arguments in order to establish the distinction between ideology and other types of human knowledge with the basic conclusion that it is ideology, "this metascientific

consciousness that creates movement and it is movement that create new society."<sup>9</sup>

Having argued the case for superiority of ideology to science and philosophy and of the ideologue to technocrat ("ideologue is the architect of new society"),<sup>10</sup> Shariati tries to convince his intellectual audience that ideology is not only in harmony with science and scientific thinking but that if it were to be valid and effective, ideology must be informed by all branches of human knowledge including science and philosophy. However, in order to arrive at the standpoints and ideals by which to evaluate and transcend the existing order, ideology must go beyond mere understanding to incorporate values and ideals that could neither be derived from nor justified by science. The central question of formulating an ideology, then, became the choice of values and ideas. Such choice, however, was not an arbitrary act or pure work of imagination. Ideology was not utopia but had to be created on the basis of human experience and human practice in terms of both the particular collectivity to which ideology addressed itself and the larger human context within which that collectivity was historically and contemporaneously located. In other words, a "perfect" ideology had to be informed of the particular conditions, needs, and central beliefs of a given society as well as the universal aspects of the human experience. In the case of Iran, choice of ideology and its concomitant values and ideals had to be based on the recognition that the Iranian society belonged to a constellation of cultural and civilizational worlds. It was a part of the East and the Third World. It was an Islamic society and thus part of the Islamic

world. And finally it belonged to the contemporary world of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

Ideology: Particularistic Criteria

As a third world society Iran was confronting Western imperialism, the most important feature of which was cultural imperialism. If Iran was to end its backwardness and dependence, she had first to establish her cultural and ideological independence vis-a-vis the West. A prominent idea that the intellectuals in other Third World countries had developed in order to formulate an ideology of national liberation was that of "return to self." The idea and the movement of "return" was born of the realization that cultural imperialism could be negated only by affirming the identity of the colonized and the oppressed in a cultural and civilizational context distinct from that of the West. Furthermore, the idea was an expression of the reassertion of the faith by the Third World nations in their own capacity to produce material and ideal culture as they had in the past. The idea also implied that so long as the relation of imperialism and exploitation among nations continued, the concepts of humanism and internationalism were merely a means of national and cultural subjugation. The Third World nations had no choice but to assert their own national distinction. Thus, Shariati's first effort to formulate a relevant ideology is directed toward determining Iran's specific cultural identity.

In Iran the idea of "return to self" was not unknown, Shariati observed, but the few intellectuals who had introduced it through the works of Aime Cesaire and Frantz Fanon had not seriously explored the

meaning and implications of this "anti-colonial cultural experience" for the Iranian society.<sup>12</sup> While the idea of return was a relevant idea for Iran, the more important question was to determine "which self to return to" and how. This was so because the Iranian society and its experience of encounter with the West were quite different from those of Africa in which the idea had originated.

By posing the question of "which self," Shariati was preparing the ground for the repudiation of a response long made to that question by many Iranian intellectuals. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Iranian intellectuals had sought to make the pre-Islamic culture the foundation of Iranian national identity. They were liberal intellectuals fascinated with European civilization and their nationalism was closely bound up with secularism and modernity. In their attempt to explain the reasons for the backwardness of Iran in comparison with Europe, they came to view the dominant system of values and belief, that is, the religion of Islam as a source of national lethargy and as an obstacle to development and progress. They traced the origins of the decline of the Iranian nation to the time when Islam was "imposed" on the Iranians by the Arabs. Thus, they called for a return to that glorious past when Iran had produced great culture and civilization, namely, the pre-Islamic history. This line of thought became an influential tradition in the secular intellectual community and later found its official expression in the modernizing regimes of the Pahlavi dynasty (1921-1979) which did their utmost to make secular kingship the mainstay of their legitimacy and to undermine the influence of religion over national life. The idea of return to

pre-Islamic culture and ethos found a new expression, although a limited one, in the 1970's in the thought of some Iranian intellectuals, ironically enough, this time against modernization and out of concern for Iranian national identity perceived to be threatened by excessive Westernization.<sup>13</sup> Given the important place of pre-Islamic cultural tradition in the Iranian nationalist thought and policy, Shariati could not but raise the question. Iran had two "historical-cultural selves," he conceded, one of which was the pre-Islamic, ancient culture. He recognized the significance of pre-Islamic culture as the first formation of Iranian identity and one that had produced a great religion and a monumental civilization. However, Shariati rejected the pre-Islamic culture as a viable source of national identity and as an adequate or relevant basis for an ideology of national liberation. Shariati made two distinct but interrelated arguments against pre-Islamic based cultural nationalism. First, he denied the existence of a cohesive cultural national community in pre-Islamic Iran. The case for cultural nationalism has been made among others by Ehsan Yarshater who maintains that "in pre-Islamic Iran a very strong sense of nationalism, nurtured by common aspirations and ideas, a common tradition and common ethnic and linguistic background prevailed."<sup>14</sup> Rejecting such claims, Shariati describes pre-Islamic Iran as a society deeply divided along caste and class lines in which social division went beyond economic life and intruded into the religious and cultural sphere, arts and life-styles, and even written and spoken languages creating such impassable demarcations among Iranians as to make even a semblance of national

unity and cultural community impossible.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of a common spirit, a common culture, and a common conscience, what held this fragmented society together was "only the principle of monarchy and worship of the king."<sup>16</sup> It was precisely due to these conditions, Shariati contends, that the Iranians welcomed the coming of Islam which brought them the message of justice and equality.

Shariati's second argument questions the very relevance of pre-Islamic culture to contemporary Iranian life. Mocking the cultural nationalist argument that the ancient Iranian culture constitutes "one of our deep-rooted and glorious cultural selves," Shariati retorts with the question "but where is this cultural self?" His own response is that this "brilliant and original culture does not exist in society but only in history."<sup>17</sup> The intellectual ideologue, unlike the historian and the archeologist took interest in the past only insofar as it aided him in understanding and shaping the present. Pre-Islamic culture, however, was a piece of "discontinued" history with little or no connection to the present. It could be more easily found in history books and museums than in the dominant beliefs and practices of the Iranians. The vast majority of the people had no memory or knowledge of this past.

Our nation does not feel that [cultural] self as its own and the heroes, personages and mythologies of that period do not have life, movement and pulsation among our people.<sup>18</sup>

Return to self was not to be return to an abstract self and a dead past but rather to a cultural self which existed in the soul and conscience of society. Iran had an Islamic cultural identity which had deep roots in Iranian history and permeated every facet of life in

Iranian society. Iranian Islam was a unique configuration of Islam as a universal religion and national characteristics of a distinct people. It was what Shariati called "the meeting of Semitic and Aryan spirits" in which Iran and Islam were so inextricably mixed as to make it impossible to separate one from the other and identify a purely Iranian or Islamic identity.<sup>19</sup> However, it was Islam that constituted the dominant feature of the Iranian history and culture. It was as Muslims that Iranians for the first time in centuries developed sentiments of national identity in opposition to Arab attempt to dominate them in the name of "Islamic universalism."<sup>20</sup> It was also within the framework of Islamic civilization that the Iranians, in the past millenium, had made their greatest contributions to human advancements in the fields of science, philosophy, arts and literature. And more recently it was an Islamic Iran that contributed to Islamic resistance against Western imperialism a leader of such stature as Afghani, as well the successful protest movement of Tobacco Rebellion (1891-2). When it came to the contemporary Iran, Shariati had little trouble persuading his audience that Islam constituted the substance of history, the spirit of culture, the mode of life, and the determinant of individual and social behavior. In short, Iran either had an Islamic cultural identity or no identity at all. Iranian Islam was what gave Iran its distinctive character as a national community and was the only force that could effectively challenge imperialism and its consequences for the Iranian society: loss of cultural identity and social cohesion.

#### Ideology: Universalistic Criteria

While Shariati disagreed with the cultural nationalists as to the

particular historical-cultural basis of a national ideology, he shared their views of existing Islam as being not conducive to human freedom and advancement. A wholesale return to traditional Islam, he maintained, would be a reactionary turn away from the movement of human progress. At any rate, such a return would be impossible (as well as undesirable) in the case of modern intellectuals and superfluous in the case of tradition-bound masses.<sup>21</sup> Consistent with his views regarding the necessity of reconstructing Islam as ideology, Shariati assumed an ideological rather than an expressive attitude toward the cultural self. Return to self in the ideological sense involved not just an act of self-affirmation but also and much more importantly "a deep and difficult movement to self-knowledge and self-reconstruction."<sup>22</sup> Such a movement required a critical attitude toward the cultural self and a readiness and ability to identify those values and ideals that were truly progressive and human in the sense that they possessed universal worth and validity. Self-knowledge entailed an awareness not only of belonging to a particular culture but also of membership in the human community in general and the world of the twentieth century in particular. And self-reconstruction required a capacity to learn from as well as to contribute to all thought and practice directed at human emancipation. The existing Islamic culture(s), long localized and isolated from the mainstream of human civilization, no longer manifested the vitality and openness of the universal ideology that gave birth to them. The ideological dynamics of Islam had been transformed into facile ideas and practices the original meaning of which had been lost even to its adherents. As a result, Islamic

cultures did not enable the Muslims to partake in let alone lead humanity's efforts toward progress. To restore the ideological vigor to Islamic culture(s), to reconstruct Islam as a dynamic and universal ideology, it was essential that Muslim intellectuals gained an adequate knowledge of world historical as well as contemporary ideas and movements and then studied and interpreted Islam in terms that were humanly progressive and universal.<sup>23</sup>

Shariati identified three moral ideals or concepts that he considered to be the most progressive in all of human thought and practice and essential to a universal ideology: mysticism, freedom, and equality.

In choosing our ideals, we must rely on solid foundations. What foundation more solid than the movement of time- history, namely, the course of mankind's evolution. What is the course of mankind's evolution? If we were to select three concepts from the infinite wealth of human language there are three concepts that history has chosen which means the movement of history is toward the crystallization of these three meanings and three dimensions of human existence.<sup>24</sup>

#### Mysticism

An interesting aspect of Shariati's discussion of mysticism is that he should have at all considered it as a dimension of his revolutionary ideology since Islamic reformers have found mysticism to be antithetical to the worldly spirit of Islam and detrimental to their own efforts of building an effective social order.<sup>25</sup> Shariati, too, was opposed to many aspects of Sufism as a tradition insofar as it focused exclusively on the individual reform and otherworldly salvation. But, he also observed positive strains in Islamic mysticism which could serve to enrich the Islamic ideology. Shariati viewed

Islamic mysticism historically as a movement of "intellectual and spiritual freedom" against the clerical domination.<sup>26</sup> Even though Shariati did not advocate the renewal of Sufi tradition, which had developed its own particular rituals and hierarchies, he found the mystical ideas of inner yearning for God and the possibility of spiritual devotion and worship without the clerical intermediacy quite attractive. The task of the Islamic ideology, he said, was to salvage the idea of God from "trivialization" undergone in the hands of akhundism and show the youth, repelled by the idea of the performance of religious duty based on compulsion and supervision, that the worship of God was a response to the profoundest need in human psyche and that response to such a need did not entail the negation of other and equally human needs.<sup>27</sup>

Shariati's attraction to mysticism should, then, primarily be viewed in terms of his singular aim of inviting the modern youth back to the embrace of Islam. In his view, formalistic rituals or any practice that evoked a sense of commonality with the clergy and the established religion would only repel, rather than attract, the youth.<sup>28</sup> Instead of mindless rituals and mediocre treatises on society and economy, the youth should be given that which both Marxist and bourgeois ideologies lacked and yet which the most important intellectuals in the capitalist and communist world yearned for: A grounding in mystic spirituality.<sup>29</sup> This was the only way to make the young generation unassailable to Marxist atheism and Western consumerism. A youth conscious and proud of this Islamic heritage and nurtured with a mystical spirit would have such a sense of self-worth

and elevation that it would no longer feel inferior to the West and its civilization. Moreover, the love of the absolute and the efforts to realize sublime values in oneself as well as the ethics of ascetism and ithar (sacrifice) so central to mysticism were essential ingredients of self-reconstruction for the youth in their efforts to reshape the social order.

This very mysticism, spiritualism, ascetism, and worship in the same degree that it can be a factor of stupefaction, weakening, and isolation of the individual from society can be, if performed correctly and consciously by the intellectual and in the context of social responsibility is not only not a negative force but the greatest revolutionary training for the committed human being.<sup>30</sup>

Shariati defined mysticism in broad and abstract terms so as to avoid the negative connotations of particular mystic doctrines such as Sufism and to render the idea consistent with other universal values such as freedom and equality. He defined mysticism as the love of and search for the absolute. The mystical quest, he said, was rooted in the primordial nature of man and arose from an "inner sense of apprehension in the natural world" and the consciousness of a "deficiency in man's relation with nature."<sup>31</sup> Man felt (spiritual) needs that nature could not satisfy. The search for the absolute was man's attempt to overcome his condition of estrangement in the world and to give his life meaning and significance.

Shariati's definition of the absolute or God is as simple as it is mundane. It is, in his own words, "from a human perspective." For Shariati, God is "the totality of all sublime absolute values," which given man's divine origin, are rooted in man himself, albeit in relative degree and only as potentialities to be actualized.<sup>32</sup> Shariati refers to these values also as "human ethics" which in

contrast to what he calls "social ethics" are metahistorical and valid beyond the ethics of any particular social class or nation and as such summon man's unconditional respect and reverence.<sup>33</sup> The effort to discern and realize these values is the criterion as well as the the guarantor of man's spiritual evolution and his growth to perfection. Mystical orientation, thus, leads not to man's alienation from himself as Ludwig Feuerbach had thought but to the highest form of self-knowledge and self-realization, namely, the discovery of the ultimate and pure source of man's own values.<sup>34</sup> Shariati rejected the pantheism and asceticism normally associated with mysticism as the worst forms of human alienation. By ignoring the material dimension of human existence, ascetic mysticism produced one dimensional beings bereft of most human qualities "no longer resembling the natural men created by God."<sup>35</sup> He contrasted this form of asceticism which entailed a negation of worldly life with the Islamic ethic of "frugality and distaste for money and accumulation of wealth."<sup>36</sup> Also pantheism with its everlasting search for the union with God denied the significance of human existence and led to self-obliteration.

Shariati rightly considered mysticism as an Islamic spiritual heritage which had genuine claim to universality. It constituted the core of major world religions as well as of some great systems of thought in both East and West. What is more, in his view, the quest for a spiritual interpretation of the universe and of humanity had become the major thrust of dissent in the West against capitalist materialism. Thus, he believed, that Islamic spirituality could make a great contribution to humanity's search for liberation which both

capitalism and Communism had brought to a dead end.<sup>37</sup>

### Freedom

The theme of freedom is one of the most chaotic and confused ideas in Shariati's works. He uses the idea of freedom in the sense of political liberty; in the sense of conscious intervention and exercise of choice in human affairs as well as in the psychological sense of self-overcoming and self-purification. He cites both J. S. Mill and J.P. Sartre as the modern sources of the ideas of freedom<sup>38</sup> and yet finds Buddha in the East and Ali in Islam as the perfect manifestations of the idea.<sup>39</sup> The concept of freedom as it is understood in the modern world is neither an Islamic concept nor a central idea in Shariati's thought. Shariati does not give the question of political freedom a serious and systematic consideration. He often uses it to condemn its abuses in the West and its suppression in Communist societies. The idea of political freedom has significance in Shariati only in the sense of freedom from arbitrary rule as well as tolerance of ideas within the framework of an Islamic ideology. Freedom in the sense of self-overcoming and purification in Shariati's thought is conceived as a kind of moral intervention in the affairs of the collective. Thus, it is the idea of freedom as conscious intervention and exercise of choice in human affairs that is central to Shariati's idea of freedom. Like other Islamic reformers, Shariati's purpose is to formulate or affirm a concept of freedom reconcilable with the idea of an omnipotent Allah who is the creator and the director of all human affairs. Like other Muslim reformers he wishes to defend Islam against the accusation of fatalism but even more importantly he aims to

undermine the fatalism and providentialism prevalent among the Muslim people. There is, of course, no clear evidence that Islam is responsible for such attitudes but it is incontestable that fatalism among Muslims is often expressed in popular religious terms with no uncertain foundation in the Quran and the tradition that endorse predestination as well as freedom.<sup>40</sup>

Shariati employs the concept of freedom in a modern sense and in two ways without, of course, making the necessary distinction: (1) Freedom in a socio-historical sense, that is, as the capacity to overcome the spontaneous dictates of nature, history, and society. (2) Freedom as choice, namely, as moral capacity to decide, individually and collectively, the direction and content of actions. The Quranic verses on freedom and predestination address, in the most basic way, both these meanings of freedom, namely, in the sense of fate and fortune of man in the world as well as in the sense of authorship of (good and evil) deeds and human responsibility before God. Now, the controversy between the Mu'tazalites (libertarians) the Ash'arites (predestinarians) in Islamic history, even though it had a definite political implication in the beginning, has been largely a theological issue centering on the question of whether God was responsible for man's deeds or He had given man total freedom over his actions. The Shi'i "resolution" of the issue as "neither freedom nor predestination but somewhere in between" also centered on the issue of the performance and non-performance of religious duties. The Quranic verses regarding the fate and the fortune of man in the world with their strong fatalistic tone seemed to have escaped attention until recent times and

crept into the popular consciousness in both Sunnis and Shi'is alike notwithstanding the libertarian position of Shi'is regarding the second meaning of freedom. Shariati does not take up this controversy as it is largely irrelevant to his purpose of exhorting Muslims to overcome their condition of backwardness and to assume responsibility for their fate. He also abandons the attempt to reconcile the seemingly contradictory verses of the Quran on freedom and predestination. Instead, he reintroduces the issue and casts it in the language of existentialism and Marxism. From existentialism Shariati adopts the idea of man's centrality in the world and the related idea of "return to man's own existential values." These ideas enable Shariati to formulate an Islamic concept of freedom based on the Quranic view of man. Shariati also adopts from existentialism an attitude of extreme voluntarism which, although not without foundation in the Quran ("God will not change the conditions of any people unless they change what is in themselves,") runs counter not only to the idea of predestination but also to modern idea of predetermination. Shariati tempers this voluntarism with a view of determinism in nature and history. Thus, he seeks to supplement the idea of freedom as choice with the idea of freedom as action according to knowledge of necessity, a Marxian idea of Hegelian origin which has an important place in Shariati's idea of freedom without his recognition of its source.

As absolute determinism deprives man of will and responsibility and degrades him to the level of a plant and an animal, so the belief in absolute freedom and will and the negation of existing laws in nature, history, and society deprives man of scientific consciousness and technical power and thrusts him into the world of imagining, myth-making, and philosophizing.<sup>41</sup>

The argument for the existence of an "Islamic fatalism" is often

based, Shariati acknowledges, on two related Islamic ideas according to which God has total control over all human affairs and that Islam invites man to total submission (the meaning of "Islam") to God. From these ideas the mistaken conclusion is drawn, objects Shariati, that Islam reduces man to a state of insignificance and makes him the plaything of the unseen forces. This misconception stems from the neglect or ignorance of the Islamic concept of man as well from a misunderstanding of God's relation to the universe. Thus, man's relation to God has been pictured as the relation of an insignificant being to a capricious despot. Such a view is based on a confusion that many Westerners make between Islam on the one hand and ancient Greek religion and medieval Christianity on the other. It is true that in the latter man has always prevailed against God as the revolt of Prometheus and the renaissance man demonstrates. In Islam, however, there is no relation of domination and subjection between man and God and submission to God, correctly understood, does not weaken man but enables him to defy all the forces which negate his humanity. Shariati interprets submission to God's will as conformity to laws of nature and history as well as to moral laws within man himself. Such conformity is not merely a passive requirement of faith but the very condition of man's salvation. There is a verse in the Quran that says: "We created man for nothing but to obey and serve us." The word ibadat is usually understood to mean worship. But it is also understood as obedience and servitude. In Shariati's view, it would seem strange, indeed, if all that God expected from man was worship and prayers. He takes this verse to mean a call to man to obey the norms (Sunna) of God. He says

servitude to God means:

...the cognition of scientific laws which exist in nature, in spirit, and in thought...as well as the life of man. These laws are scientific laws written by God and grafted onto the world and man. Submission and worship means that man [must]... discover and then obey these scientific laws in order to attain salvation and perfection.<sup>42</sup>

Shariati approaches the question also from the perspective of man's place in Islam or Islamic humanism (which will be more fully discussed in the next chapter). Shariati has a dualistic or in his own estimation a dialectic view of man. Man is seen both as a being of nature who shares many characteristics of other natural phenomena like plants and animals and as a divine creation who shares many of God's attributes and whose ultimate destiny is to become a Godlike being. The divine attributes that render man an autonomous being and set him above the rest of nature are consciousness, will, and creativity.<sup>43</sup> For Shariati these are not merely descriptive qualities of man as they are in Sartrean existentialism but only potentialities the unfolding of which is the criterion of man's evolution and the measure of his Godward movement.<sup>44</sup> However insofar as man is a part of the natural world he is also subject to the blind necessities that nature imposes on him both from without and from within. Man is free but limited in the exercise of his freedom by the virtue of the fact that he has to work within the confines of the natural world. Shariati speaks of "the prisons of man" or determinisms that man must overcome in order to make his potential freedom a reality. To free himself from the dictates of nature, history and society, he must learn their laws and shape the world in accordance with his own design.<sup>45</sup> The Islamic conception of man not only encourages man to master the condition of his existence in

the world but makes it an essential requirement for man's upward elevation from the world of inanimate nature and animal.

Mastery over nature and society is only the first, albeit an important step, toward freedom. Man is free if he can also determine the value content and orientation of his action in his relation with nature and society. There is nothing in nature and social organization of man to provide him with directive moral principles. And insofar as man is ruled by blind necessities within himself and is motivated in his actions by selfishness, sexual instinct, and drive for power and wealth, his mastery of nature and society may lead not to his liberation but to his enslavement. Thus, there is a need for supreme ethical principles higher than "moral traditions derived from particular social relations."<sup>46</sup> In order to become truly free, man must conform to and obey God's moral laws. In Shariati's view, Islamic ethics or absolute moral norms are designed not to subjugate man but to provide him with supreme standards with which to direct his conduct in accordance with goodness and perfection. Then, man's responsibility to God is at the same time man's responsibility to himself. Man is completely free to accept this responsibility or to reject it.

### Equality

The idea of social justice constitutes a central core of Shariati's thought. What is more significant is that Shariati goes beyond the Islamic idea of charity and mutual aid advocated by most Muslim thinkers and calls for "class equality" and the right of each individual to all of life's material and cultural benefits. He says that love of equality and aversion to privilege is one of the most

sacred and deep-rooted human sentiments.<sup>47</sup> Noting the fact that in the contemporary era, due to rising mass consciousness and intensification of exploitation, this "natural human sentiment," has crystalized into a worldwide egalitarian revolution, Shariati warns: "Any ideology which does not address this question of equality and does not place itself in the course of this egalitarian and anti-capitalist movement," is condemned to perish and wither away.<sup>48</sup> The need for social and economic equality and elimination of privilege and exploitation was particularly acute in Islamic societies in which the vast majority suffered from inequalities imposed by centuries of feudal bondage as well as those generated by dependent capitalism. The success of any ideology largely depended on the extent to which it was able to incorporate the most pressing needs of the people. Islam and Shi'ism were no exceptions.

Shariati was often accused of having reduced Islam to the words and deeds of Abuzar, an ascetic disciple of the Prophet who advocated egalitarianism and distribution of wealth. Islam, it was said, for Shariati was a creed solely concerned with human material welfare. This accusation of reductionism was, of course, without serious foundation. Shariati, too, believed that the ultimate aim of Islam was human salvation. However, he conceived of human salvation not in terms of after-life and the securement of a place in paradise but as the attainment of qualities that made man worthy of his station as a human being and thus deserving of God's favor and blessing. The secret of the Islamic idea of salvation lay in the Prophetic dictum, "acquire God's attributes." Now, to believe, as the leaders of the established

religion did, that in a condition of poverty, exploitation engendered by the class system, men could nurture such attributes as love, compassion, integrity, kindness, and love of beauty was the worst form of deception. "To preach spirituality and perfection of ethical values to a hungry man is a deception and a calamity, a state into which both mysticism and religion had historically degenerated."<sup>49</sup> Every class system, especially capitalism, militated against the very possibility of religion and annulled its very purpose which was human goodness and Godliness. The class system warped the human character and undermined the natural ties of unity and solidarity among men.<sup>50</sup> It turned the human community into a jungle of beasts and men themselves into predators and prey, wolves and sheep. The class system of capitalism even at best made life for the vast majority an unequal race in which those on foot no matter how steady and heroic were destined to lose to those riding. Thus, it generated hostility and resentment. The class system alienated men not only from each other but also from themselves and from God. Here, all human strivings for life advancement and all God-given talents for moral perfection were reduced to efforts directed either at plunder or survival. As a result, men came to view themselves not in terms of their real or potential qualities as human beings but of what they had gained in the class battles, namely, unnatural defects and undeserved virtues.<sup>51</sup> Possessed by things and qualities they were supposed to confer, men in class society had at best limited possibility for self-knowledge and for discovering in themselves the source of those higher values which make man worthy of his status as the representative of God on earth.

The twin aims of Islamic mission, according to Shariati, were first to establish righteous leadership which guide men to God and to perfection; second, as a precondition to the first, to establish equality and justice on earth and therefore unity among mankind. He substantiates this view of Islam by the following verses of the Quran in which reason is given for the coming of the prophets:

O Prophet, We have sent you forth as a witness, a bearer of good news and a warning, one who shall call men to Allah by his leave and guide them like a shining light. (Parties: 460)

We have sent our prophets with veritable signs and brought down with them scriptures and the scales of justice so that men uphold fairness. (Iron: 25)

#### Shariati and Contemporary Ideologies

On the basis of these criteria, Shariati rejects all other religions and ideologies except Islam which in his view fulfills all the requirements of a "perfect ideology." Shariati views non-Islamic religions and modern social doctrines of liberalism and Marxism as one-dimensional schools of thought stressing only one aspect of the totality of man's essential needs. Shariati attacks Marxism, liberal humanism, and atheistic existentialism for their denial of the supernatural origins of humanity and human moral values a denial which in his view has led to degradation of man. Shariati believes that man possesses "a sacred substance;" that human values are sacred ideals "eternal and absolute," and that man is an idealistic being who strives to transform what is into what ought to be.<sup>52</sup> Yet, Shariati's own account of man's historical achievement as a forging of "the chains of human captivity"<sup>53</sup> and as a search for deliverance turned into "disaster"<sup>54</sup> bears no witness to his claim that belief in divine

origins of man and his moral values, outside concrete sociohistorical strivings of men to overcome obstacles to their freedom, has been of great worldly consequence to mankind. Shariati's list of man's eternal and moral values includes freedom from compulsion, justice, truth, the primacy of society over the individual, a common measure for value and achievement, the banishment of war and exploitation, the elimination of class conflict, etc.<sup>55</sup> But Shariati accepts only one particular interpretation of these values. Shariati considers love, worship, and sacrifice as the emanations of the divine spirit in mankind,<sup>56</sup> yet he is decidedly against Christian love, idol worship, and Hindu sacrifice.

Shariati is more relevant when he focuses on the problems of social organization in capitalist and socialist societies and the ideals and values underlying them. He expresses a definite appreciation of liberal values such as intellectual freedom and tolerance and the democratic negation of dictatorship and affirmation of popular sovereignty. But Shariati is much more against capitalism than he is in favor of liberalism and democracy. He believes that capitalism with its system of manipulation and exploitation is irreconcilable with liberal and democratic values and that the emergence of fascism demonstrate their "primordial antagonism."<sup>57</sup> Shariati also opposes Marxism and Communism which he believes, in search for equality have negated human freedom. He severely criticizes the ideological uniformity and rigidity of the socialist societies in which a group of party leaders decides the shape of social organization and the direction of all human endeavors. Yet, the idea of pluralism and political freedom outside a coherent and comprehensive ideology

remains largely alien to Shariati's own thought. Although he suffered clerical intolerance and political dictatorship, his vision of society is that of a collectivity united around a common belief which is Shi'i Islam. However, there is evidence from Shariati's writings to suggest that in his ideal society he would accept competing and even conflicting interpretations of Islam.

While Shariati rejects both capitalism and communism, he is more sympathetic to Marxism than he is to other non-Islamic ideologies. The bulk of Shariati's harsh polemic against Marxism is contained in a work that was published by the Shah's regime without his permission and while he was under house arrest. The purpose was to discredit Shariati by insinuating that he was cooperation with the regime against the Marxist opposition to the Shah. This had been an early work of Shariati. Later, Shariati came to view Marxism as a competing rather than conflicting ideology with Islam and even maintained that "in elaboration of our aims and realization of our Islamic ideals we learn from Marxism as we learn from science."<sup>58</sup> Indeed Shariati shares many ideas with Marxism including a class analysis of history, society, and even of religion.

#### Components of Ideology

An adequate definition of ideology should identify the kinds of mental and practical activities the concept is intended to include. In this respect Shariati's definition of ideology, is not quite clear. Throughout his works Shariati uses the concept in at least two ways. He often defines ideology in a broad sense to include descriptive and evaluative ideas about the world, man, and society as well as ideals

and prescriptions for change.<sup>59</sup> Such an understanding of ideology is in accord with our definition given in the introduction and is similar to Raymond Aron's conception of ideology as a "pseudo-systematic formulation of total vision of the historical world,"<sup>60</sup> which Shariati must have picked up in his reading of Aron's works. But, Shariati also defines ideology in the narrower sense of a set of evaluative and prescriptive ideas. In his formal presentation of the total Islamic doctrine, Shariati reproduces this inconsistency by listing ideology in the narrow sense as a distinct component of maktab, meaning ideology in the broad and inclusive sense.<sup>61</sup>

It is more consistent with Shariati's view of "Islam as a total and complete ideology" to take the inclusive concept of ideology as the basis of approach to Shariati's account of Islam and to social reality. Thus, Shariati's formulation of an Islamic ideology would be presented here in terms of the following components or categories: 1. World view in which will be included Shariati's view of man or his "anthropology". 2. Philosophy of history. 3. Sociology. 4. Ideal community.

## CHAPTER 3

### NOTES

1. Ali Shariati, CW, Vol. 23: World View and Ideology (Tehran: Mona, 1982), P. 89.
2. Ibid., PP. 90-91.
3. Shariati, Ali is Alone (Tehran: Ershad, n.d.), P. 3.
4. Ibid.
5. Shariati, CW, Vol. 4: Return, P. 150.
6. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 98.
7. Ibid., PP. 96-8 and Return, P. 144.
8. Shariati, World View and Ideology, PP. 165-66.
9. Shariati, Return, P. 150.
10. Ibid., P. 94.
11. Shariati, Iqbal, PP. 25-26.
12. Shariati, Return, PP. 21-22.
13. Hormoz Farhat, "Old and New Values in Changing Cultural Patterns," in Iran: Past, Present, and Future, ed. Jane W. Jacqz (New York: Aspen Institute, 1976), PP. 433-438. See also Ehsan Yarshater, note 14 below.
14. Ehsan Yarshater, "Cultural Development of Iran," in Iran: Past, Present, Future, ed. Jane W. Jacqz (New York: Aspen Institute, 1976), P. 408.
15. Shariati, Return, PP. 316-18.
16. Ibid., P. 319.
17. Ibid., P. 320.

18. Ibid., P. 29.
19. Shariati, Recognition, P. 280.
20. Ibid., PP. 54-55 and PP. 163-64.
21. Shariati, Return, P. 31.
22. Shariati, Iqbal, P. 114.
23. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 239.
24. Shariati, Vol. 2: Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction (n.p.: Institute, 1978.), P. 140.
25. Mazheruddin Sidqie, (General Characteristics of Islamic Modernism," Islamic Studies Vol. 9, No. 1 (March 1970), PP. 45-53.
26. Shariati, Recognition, PP. 195-97. See also Vol. 29: Mee'ad ba Ebrahim, P. 655.
27. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 167.
28. Ibid., P. 53.
29. Ibid., P. 52.
30. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 173.
31. Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 63.
32. Ibid., P. 95.
33. Ibid., P. 79.
34. Ibid., P. 99.
35. Shariati, Man Without Self, P. 249.
36. Ibid., P. 250.
37. Shariati, Marxism and other Western Fallacies, trans. R. Campbell (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980), P. 95.
38. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 51.
39. Ibid., PP. 143-44.
40. Here is a sample of the relevant Quranic verses:  
Verses on Freedom of Choice

1. God changes not what is in people until they change what is in thememselvess. (Thunder, 11)
2. Whatever good visits thee, it is of God; whatever evil visits thee, it is of thyself. (Women, 79)
3. Whoso does righteous, it is to his own gain, and whoso does evil, it is to his own loss. (Distinguished, 46)
4. Proofs have come unto you from your Lord, so whoso seeth, it is for his own good, and whoso is blind is blind to his own hurt. (Cattle, 105)

Verses on Predestination

5. The Lord creates whatever He will and He chooses; they have not the choice. (The Story, 67)
6. Then God leads astray whomsoever He will, and He guides whomsoever He will, and He is the All-mighty, the All- wise. (Abraham, 4)
7. Say: 'O God, Master of the Kingdom, Though givest the kingdom to whom Though Wilt, and seizeth kingdom from whom Though wilt, Thou exaltest whom Though wilt, and Thou abasest whom Thou wilt; in Thy hand is the good; Though art powerful over everything.' (The House of Imran, 25)
8. No affliction befalls in the earth or in yourselves, but it is in a book, before We created it; that is easy for God. (Iron, 22)
41. Shariati, Return, P. 339.
42. Shariati, Vol. 19: Hossein, the Heir of Adam, PP. 340-41. See Also Recognition, P. 317 and P. 337.
43. Man Without Self, PP. 166-67.
44. Ibid., P. 168.
45. Ibid., PP. 169-78.
46. Ibid., P. 181.
47. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 132.
48. Ibid., P. 46.
49. Shariati, Man Without Self, P. 357.
50. Shariati, Ibid, P. 356.

51. Shariati, Ibid., P. 316.
52. Shariati, Marxism, P. 30.
53. Ibid., P. 36.
54. Ibid., P. 39.
55. Ibid., PP. 63-64.
56. Ibid., P. 30.
57. Shariati, Return, P. 61.
58. Shariati, World View, P. 115.
59. Ibid., PP. 70-71.
60. Quoted by Chaim I. Waxman, ed. The End of Ideology Debate (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1969), P. 3.
61. Shariati, Islamology: Lectures 1-2, P. 97

## CHAPTER IV

### WORLD VIEW OF ISLAM

Shariati is perhaps the first the Muslim thinker to have introduced and widely employed the modern concept of world view in the study of Islam. He considers the concept as one of the most significant achievements of modern thought and indispensable in laying the foundation stone of Islam as a comprehensive ideology. The world view concept, he maintains, would give direction and coherence to the study and understanding of Islam which would otherwise appear as a collection of fragmented ideas.<sup>1</sup> However, the concept of world view plays a more substantive role in Shariati's thought than merely as an aid to systematization of Islamic studies. It suggests and legitimates an interpretive rather than a dogmatic approach to Islam. The world view of Islam, that is, Islam's view of the world, man, and society is usually understood to be a set of eternally fixed truths which ought to be learned and confirmed by man whereas world view as understood in modern thought is a man-made concept neither given nor fixed but a product of human circumstances and as such subject to change and development. Shariati seems to be aware of the difficulty of applying the modern concept of world view to Islamic ideas. He resolves the dilemma by emphasizing the ubiquity of change in human condition and the consequence that change and development may have for the relation

of the individual to the world and for his understanding of religious truths. He accepts the immutability of Islam but at the same time holds that change in the human condition (a reality which Islam affirms) inevitably brings about changes in man's perspective of the world and that includes the conception that he forms of religious ideas and principles. Drawing on the tradition of the parallel between the Quran and the world of nature, Shariati writes:

Islam or Quran is a truth and a reality like nature. Nature is a fixed reality but we as human beings have throughout history changed our relation to nature as well as our understanding of it. As Muslims, too, we must, in our relation with the fixed reality of the Quran and Islam, change our conception of them in accordance with the needs of our time.<sup>2</sup>

The important point in Shariati's discussion of world view is the stress on the role of man in giving life and meaning to religious ideas and ideals. He advances the same thesis as Malek Bennabi of Algeria that if Islamic thought was decadent it was because Muslim man was decadent. Shariati gives the same idea a more definite formulation: "Islam does not exist except in thought and [action of] man."<sup>3</sup> A person's view of Islam is ultimately dependent on his world view and the aims he pursues in life. These are in turn are conditioned by the orientation of the individuals and groups advocating Islam but also by the level of intellectual and cultural development in society. The sameness and rigidity in the understanding and interpretation of Islam is not a measure of Islam's universality but of cultural stagnation. Here Shariati employs the concepts of open and closed society and world view borrowed from Henri Bergson and the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. It is also to be noted that by society Shariati means the traditional religious society which despite all the modernizing changes

remained closed and impenetrable. Whether an Islamic world view is open or closed depends on the quality of the individual Muslim mind and the society nurturing it. As there are open and closed societies so are there modes of Islamic perspectives corresponding to them:

When society remains limited within certain confines...it decays ...In such a society thought becomes stagnant...sentiment becomes decadent and perspective and world view remains petty and rigid. But when this society opens to its surroundings, men come up to the rooftops, see other places and observe the happenings in their century ...There are two types of society, open and closed, earth-bound and mobile, decaying and progressive, stagnant and dynamic and accordingly there are two kinds of Islam because there are two types of minds and Islam does not exist except in thought and in man.<sup>4</sup>

A closed society is characterized by limited practical activities in the sphere of economic production and exchange and much more importantly for Shariati by the extremely limited cultural and intellectual intercourse with the outside world. Whether a society is closed or open to the flow of cultural and intellectual ideas from other societies directly determines the way the individual views the world and even his own religion and God. In a closed society religion is a collection of unchanging beliefs and routine rituals impervious to human understanding or to consideration of practical consequences. In such a society there is more or less a uniform conception of religious ideas across individuals and generations. There is no room for war of beliefs and conflict of ideas.<sup>5</sup> By contrast, one of the characteristics of an open society is that there is no uniformity in religious ideas and individuals have varying conceptions of religion. A related characteristic of such a society is "change in religion or at least the conception of it."<sup>6</sup> Thus, Shariati reconciles the two conceptions of world view by maintaining that determination of what

Islam is significantly depends on man's world view. A society and man's world view is effected either by a change in material conditions of society or through cultural contact. There is a reciprocal relation between these two modes of change. However, Shariati favors the voluntarist side of this equation: "If we open our door to other ideas, other religions and other societies, our society would be an open one and the individuals in such a society would have an open world view."<sup>7</sup>

A related concept in Shariati's idea of change in world view is that of hijra (emigration). Shariati claims that he has discovered in the Quran and the history of Islam a principle of change and transformation never considered in the history of sociological thought. In his view, hijra (the emigration of the Prophet Muhammad from Mecca to Medina) is a sociological principle which hitherto Muslims have mistakenly taken to be merely an event in the life of the Prophet. Shariati observes that all 27 known civilizations in the history of mankind are associated with emigration and built by emigrants. On the surface Shariati's discussion of this idea seems to be no more an apology for islam and a sociological reading of Shariati, as Shahrokh Akhavi has done, naturally leads to the conclusion that "...it is not clear where [Shariati] wants to go with this factor [of emigration]."<sup>8</sup> However, Shariati's purpose is not to provide "an example of Islam's contribution to sociology"<sup>9</sup> but to provide an Islamic justification for a sociological reading of Islam. Shariati identifies two kinds of emigration as prelude to the emergence of new civilizations and societies. The first type is the emigration of groups of people and their settlement in another land. The second type is the emigration of

outstanding individuals from their societies for a considerable period of time. Here, Shariati cites Arnold Toynbee as an aid to his "discovery" of the Quranic principle of change saying that "all great leaders who have changed their environment and their societies have had their life in two stages: leave of society and return to [it]."<sup>10</sup> This, Shariati maintains is not only true of God's prophets but also of modern leaders of Asia and Africa who upon return to their native country have begun a movement for a new society. Shariati comes very close to the idea that the readiness of the Prophet Muhammad to engage in intercourse with other cultures and religions enabled him to gain much wisdom not accessible to the common people or the custodians of the traditional culture in the Meccan society. However, Shariati was a true believer and this is probably far from what he had in mind. What the life of the Prophet does indicate for Shariati is that those individuals whose thought patterns and world view are shaped by the decadent religion and tradition cannot be at the same time transformers of society. The emigration of the individuals who have the potentiality for effecting great social changes, according to Shariati, purifies them of the traditional spirit and enables them "to reconstruct themselves and to create in themselves the foundations for new thoughts, new ideas"<sup>11</sup> or in the case of the Prophets new revelations. Shariati's conclusion is that "these individuals who in the East or West have made history, culture, and movements are emigrants, men who are not the products of their environment..."<sup>12</sup> When we consider Shariati's view of the enlightened intellectuals as the legatees of the Prophets (chapter 7), it becomes clear why Shariati

should stress the idea of emigration. In the following section, we shall discuss Shariati's substantive ideas about what he calls a "modern Islamic world view."<sup>13</sup>

#### Tawhid (monotheism)

Shariati designates his world view as that of tawhid. Tawhid is the first and most important principle of Islamic faith and signifies the belief in Allah who is infinite and eternal, all-wise, all-powerful and the supreme Creator and Sustainer of the universe. The opposite of tawhid is shirk (polytheism) which means ascribing partners to God and worshipping anything and anyone besides Him. In other words, tawhid is a theological doctrine of divine unity. This is how tawhid has been understood throughout the Islamic centuries by Muslim theologians and laymen alike. However, some modern Muslim thinkers believe that tawhid means (or should mean) more than divine unity. For Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a well-known Muslim scholar and apologist of Islam tawhid, besides being a metaphysical assertion about God, is also a method of social integration while according to Dr. Fazlur Rahman, the principle of tawhid must lead to the negation of essential inequalities among men: "Monotheism becomes meaningful in the eyes of the Quran only if it results in the moral consequence of basic equality of mankind. Divorced from this consequence, monotheism becomes meaningless and is in fact monolatory (i.e. the worship of only one being)."<sup>14</sup> The modern attempt at reinterpretation of tawhid takes its most daring and complete form in Shariati's thought in which tawhid is conceived as a world view entailing not only a view of the Godhead but also, and more

importantly, a view of the nature of the universe, man, and society as well as the nature of human knowledge. Shariati raises the concept of tawhid to the unitary principle of Islam from which all other articles of faith must be derived and in reference to which all Islamic ideas and practices must be understood and judged. Thus, Shariati questions the soundness and validity of the traditional division in which tawhid is considered as one, albeit the most important, among other Islamic principles of faith (which for the Shi'is include the belief in prophethood, resurrection, divine justice, and divine guidance through the spiritual leadership of the Imams). Shariati complains that the concept of tawhid remains the most obscure and unexplored in traditional Islamic theory which, in his view, is only devoted to secondary and derivative principles of religion. The ordinary conception of tawhid and one that is taught in every elementary school and, at a higher level of sophistication, in theological seminaries is that God is one and that it has this and that attribute. To Shariati tawhid understood in this way is a useless dogma with little practical value or consequence for social life.<sup>15</sup> Shariati does not deny that tawhid above all else means divine unity but he denies that it is limited to this theological concept. Shariati's logic is something like the following: How is it possible that the most basic principle of Islam, a religion that aims at man's liberation be devoid of all practical implications for various aspects of man's life on earth? If the primary message of Islam were to bring unity of worship, it would have had historical rather than perennial and universal significance. In a world dominated by monotheism the idea tawhid as oneness of God

becomes superfluous.

The world view of tawhid, in Shariati's thought is the conception of the existent as an integrated and harmonious totality the foundation of which is the unity of God, man, and nature. By unity Shariati intends a relation of harmony and complementarity between God and his creation rather than one of fusion and identity as conceived in pantheism. Also unlike the Sufi and Vedic pantheism in which the One is the only true reality, Shariati believes in separate and independent existence of the material world. However, the material world in his view is so infused with and invested with the divine purpose and spirit as to render all division and discord between God and his creation on the one hand and among the various manifestations of his creation inconceivable and contrary to the very idea of an omnipotent and purposeful creator. Furthermore, such a conception of the existent is not, for Shariati a description of reality which he admits is fret with conflicts and contradictions. Rather, tawhid or unitarianism is seen as the original state as well as the ultimate direction of the universe. It is Shariati's state of nature as well as his utopia. According to this vision, all contradictions and divisions are relative, apparent and transitory. Monotheism or unitarian world view is not an invented idea, a figment of the imagination but an idea based on true nature of the universe as well as the initial state of humanity's relation to itself, God, and the world. It is, in Shariati's words "a reflection of the [essential] truth of the world in the heart of the prophets and therefrom spread among the people."<sup>16</sup> As such monotheism is a permanent vision of the world by which historical

reality is assessed and criticized:

I have said that the very structure of tawhid cannot accept contradiction or disharmony in the world. According to the world view of tawhid, therefore, there is no contradiction between man and nature, spirit and body, this world and the hereafter, matter and meaning. Nor can tawhid accept legal, class, social, political, social, national, territorial, genetic or even economic contradiction for it implies a mode of looking at the existent as unity.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast polytheism is a view of the world as a fragmented order in which division and conflict, discord and disharmony inhere in the very essence of reality. Shariati rejects the traditional view that polytheism is merely the belief in multiplicity of deities. Rather, he maintains, polytheism is the ideological reflection and justification of social order in which a variety of discordant and conflicting forces dominate and manipulate human beings. Shariati takes issue with David Hume and those sociologists of religion who consider monotheism to be a late development in history. The initial state of mankind, Shariati asserts, is one of harmony, unity, and equality. In such pristine state there does not yet exist the separation of economic, political, and spiritual powers of man and domination of these powers over him. Hence there is no need for corresponding Gods representing the dominant forces in the life of mankind. Monotheism is not only a universal world view of divine origin but also one that reflects and corresponds with a certain social order based on unity and brotherhood. Polytheism, on the other hand, has purely historical origins and its emergence coincides with the division of society into conflicting groups and classes.<sup>18</sup>

Shariati's view of tawhid has implications not only for the relation of men in society but also, as can be seen from the statement

quoted on page nine, for man's relation with God and nature. Its aim is to raise the place of man and nature in the scheme of creation by dissolving the dualism of living in the world and living for God. Below, we shall discuss three aspects of Shariati's effort to bring together man as producer of material and ideal values and God as the omnipotent and supertranscendent creator and sustainer of the universe.

#### This-worldliness of Islam

A persistent theme in Shariati's works is the worldly character of Islamic religion. The greatest accomplishment of Islam, according to Shariati, is to have put human spirituality in the service of life. Islam did with religion what Socrates had done with philosophy: It brought religion down from heaven to earth and out from the abodes of worship to the marketplace.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Islam was able to mobilize the vast reservoir of man's spiritual energy hitherto devoted to the preparation for a future life for the purpose of constructing a powerful civilization and social organization. Some of Shariati's discussion of this theme is simply an introduction of well-worn ideas into Shi'i Islam already known elsewhere in the Islamic world. However, there are also some significant departures. Thus, for Shariati Islam is not merely a two-dimensional religion tending to both the spiritual and material needs of man but a religion in which materialism and material life constitute the foundation of Islamic idealism and spirituality. Islam not only does not have a dualistic conception of material and spiritual, this-worldly and otherworldly but views this world as "the only place" where man through "work, production, progress and acquisition of material and ideal values"

becomes worthy of salvation.<sup>20</sup> Thus, it is not merely "good works," that is, the performance of religious duties as traditionally understood that paves man's path to God but it is the "construction of this world and tending to goods and material production" which is the "path for reaching God and for reaching the good future."<sup>21</sup> Shariati defines ibadah (worship) as obedience to God's laws in the realm of nature and spirit. Performance of religious rituals is only one aspect of ibadah in the latter sphere. But ibadah also involves efforts in understanding the laws of the natural world and acting upon that understanding which is "the path to salvation and progress."<sup>22</sup> Shariati views the universe and all that there is in it not as a debase place but as a God's ayat (sign). The division of the world into material and spiritual, physical and metaphysical does not fit the world view of the Quran and is a result of later developments under the Greek influence. In the Quran "God is as present in the dust of the earth as in the Gabriel's Revelation. In fact, in the Quran God swears not by spirits and by angels but by such profane and mundane things as night, clay, hoof of a horse.<sup>23</sup>

In his account of Islamic history, Shariati considers the first phase in the deformation of Islam the attempt to empty it of its worldly, social, political and economic relevance and reduce it to a "set of beliefs and practices aimed at purification of the individuals for salvation after death."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the vested interests with the aid of the powerful clerical class made the Islamic philosophy of ma'ad (return, resurrection) a means of diverting people away from material life and affairs of this world. Accordingly, akherat (afterlife) was

posed as a geographical zone demarcated from Donya (this world) and as a place in which the faithful would be compensated for all the ills that afflict him in this world. Thus, those who suffer poverty, abjectness, ill-health, incapacity in this world, will be rewarded with wealth, well-being, dignity, and freedom in the next. However, true Islam does not accept such discontinuity and opposition between life and afterlife. Akherat in Islamic world view is a direct and immediate outcome and reflection of man's accomplishments on earth. Shariati often makes use of the famous saying of the Prophet to support his position: "the one who does not have a livelihood, neither shall he have an after-life." He interprets this saying as to apply not to individuals but to societies for its application to individual would mean that only the rich will have a good afterlife. This tradition according to Shariati applies above all to societies in the sense that "a poor society does not have religion." "If they do not have material life, neither do they have a spiritual life. The religion of a hungry society is traditional superstition...and we see in reality that a society decadent economically is also decadent spiritually."<sup>25</sup>

The question of afterlife is a fundamental principle of the Islamic doctrine but it occupies a very minor place in Shariati's thought and then only in order to emphasize the priority and centrality of earthly existence. This naturally aroused not only the suspicion of Shariati's hostile critics but also invited the questioning of his colleagues as to why Shariati did not address the principle of ma'ad (return and resurrection) as an independent topic and in its own right. Shariati's response was that he had to overcome

centuries of one-sided emphasis on this belief which had made Islam into a religion of death and resurrection. Insofar as Shariati does have a concept of afterlife, his interpretation constitutes a radical departure from the traditional conception. In what he calls an "ethical" conception of life and afterlife, Shariati maintains that Donya and akherat are merely two modes of orientation to the world and social life. Donya (one of the literal meaning of which is base and low) refers, in Shariati's view, to the quality of narrowness and baseness in man's orientation to other men and to the aims of life. The person who sees in everything and everyone a means of satisfying his own interest, he is bound to donya even when he performs a spiritual act. Conversely, the individual who pursues high ideals for their own sake and sacrifices his own good for the benefit of others, he is oriented to akherat (literally meaning "end") even in most mundane acts.<sup>26</sup> The idea of heaven and hell receives similar treatment in Shariati's scant remarks on the subject. Heaven in Islam represents, in Shariati's view, the highest ideal in the life of man and society: "only those individuals reach it that make themselves worthy of it. In other words, men must with efforts and sacrifice and awareness create the ideal society which in practice is the same [as heaven]."<sup>27</sup>

#### An Islamic humanism

Islam rejects the anthropocentric view of the universe which constitutes the philosophical foundation of the mainstream Western humanism. Islamic universe is a theocentric one and the highest purpose of man is to serve God. Also in theoretical Islam human

knowledge and experience are valued insofar as they do not contradict divine ideas of the natural and human world and the divine plan for a good social order. Thus, Islam has been characterized by some Western Islamologists as a mode of anti-humanism for the reason of its "refusal to accept man to any extent whatever as the arbiter or measure of things."<sup>28</sup> Such a characterization of Islam confuses the theoretical and historical realities of Islam and underestimates men's ability to pursue their own aims within a given sociocultural order. However, it is safe to say that the solution of the problems facing Muslim societies today requires the ability to draw on many fields of knowledge as well as varieties of human experience which fall outside the domain of Islamic theory and practice. Thus, Islamic reformers have continually sought to extend the sphere of man in Islam while at the same retaining the faith which constitutes the integral part of the Muslim humanity. This intellectual search took its most explicit form in Iqbal who raised the status of man in Islam to the level of "co-worker with God" in the transformation of the world. The ethical aspect of humanism, that is, concern with the material and moral welfare of man in the world as the primary aim of Islam has also become a persistent theme of Muslim writings. These ideas are the main elements of the contemporary efforts to formulate an "Islamic humanism."

Shariati is acutely aware of the central importance of a doctrine of man for Islamic ideology. The question of man, in his view is "the key to the solution of all problems of Islamology for man is the centerpiece of all the questions that are at stake."<sup>29</sup> In a way most

of Shariati's works are meant to be contributions to the idea that human being and his welfare is the measure by which all ideas, practices and institutions ought to be judged. Shariati's rejection of ijtihad in its narrow traditional conception which restricts judgment on critical social issues to a small elite; his view of tradition as a fetter on human advancement and his idea of freedom all aim at humanization of Islamic thought and society. Although, Shariati's writings on humanism do not amount to a coherent doctrine of man they do present a new vocabulary of motive into Shi'i Islam which until recently had remained untouched by the intellectual developments elsewhere in the Muslim world. Although the idea of human nobility has Quranic foundation, orthodox Shi'ism in its mainstream has always stressed the other feature of man, also with Quranic basis, presenting human being as dependent and helpless creature requiring supervision of the clergy and the intercession of the Imams in order to achieve salvation. In Shariati's words, "our present religion negates the human dignity and values affirmed by the Quran."<sup>30</sup> Sufism, while recognizing the human nobility reserves such a station for a happy few who accomplish the station of perfect man by self-purification and largely in isolation from society. Shariati's aim is to bring together the two aspects of the Quranic definition of man and establish the objective possibility of attaining human nobility in this world and in relation to other human beings.

Just as the Renaissance humanists derived the themes of human dignity and freedom from the biblical story of man, Shariati and other Muslim intellectuals base their idea of Islamic humanism on the

following verses of the Quran:

When God intended to create Adam, he said to the angels: "I am setting a viceregent on earth" To this angels replied: "Will though put there a being who will work mischief on the earth and shed blood while we sing your glories and exalt our utter Holiness?" "I know what you do not know." God replied. Then "He taught Adam names, all of them." He then brought a competition between angels and Adam asking the former to "name things." When angels failed Adam could. God asked the Angels to prostrate themselves before Adam and honor him. (Q. 2:30-34)

Also:

We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it; and man carried it. Surely, he is sinful, very foolish. (33: 72)

and:

"Surely, we created man out of a clay of mud molded." (15:26) and "I have shaped him and breathed my spirit into him." (15:29)

Much of Shariati's discussion on Quranic humanism is mere apology and it is meant either to restore the faith of his youthful audience or to defend Islam against its Western Westernized detractors. However, the fact that the Quran accords a high station to man is not denied by those who charge Islam with anti-humanism. According to Grunebaum while the Quran views man as a noble creature, it fails to encourage him "to use the forces of the physical universe as the instruments of his self-liberation."<sup>31</sup> It is precisely this kind of conception that Shariati aims to refute. In his interpretation of these Quranic verses, Shariati maintains that man in the Quran is invested with the essential attributes of God, the most important of which are creativity, knowledge, and will. Man, according to Quran is a theomorphic being, a viceregent and a trustee of God on earth and possessor of names. Shariati takes "the words" to mean man's capacity to know the truths about all that exists in the world. More

specifically this knowledge consists of understanding the nature of man, the structure of the world, and human relation to the universe.<sup>32</sup> Traditionally "names" have been interpreted as the names of plants and animals and the Sufis understood by them attributes of God but to Shariati it implies the capacity for attainment of scientific truths as well divine truths implanted in man's own spirit. The term trust has often been interpreted as the freedom of moral choice. Shariati accepts this traditional interpretation but as we have discussed in Chapter 3 he broadens the concept to also include the freedom from domination from dictates of nature and history. Shariati is not consistent in his derivation of meanings from the Quran. At one point, he derives from the concept of "trust" just about everything: "Trust consists of that matter which has entered man and can elevate him to the highest imaginable level of perfection in the world. Thus, will, choice, consciousness, awareness, power of creativity, love, gnosis, theosophy, all of these and many other things that we do not yet know and may become manifest in the future are included in the meaning of trust."<sup>33</sup>

The concepts of creativity, knowledge, and freedom in Shariati have both temporal and moral dimensions. The temporal aspects of Shariati's interpretation of the Quran pose particular problems for Shariati since in the traditional Islam man can attain salvation regardless of his temporal capabilities and life conditions. Yet in Shariati's view the capacity for industry and art and the attainment of scientific truths is made a very condition of Godliness and perfection. Would Shariati consider the idea that moderns have

realized more of divine attributes than their predecessors? There is a clear implication of this view in Shariati's thought. At times, however, Shariati takes a definite ideological posture. Thus, while he underrates the significance of scientific and technological achievements and emphasizes the moral shortcomings of modern societies, he makes the same achievements the foundation for the realization of man's divine nature in the condition of underdevelopment.

The moral and spiritual dimension of man's divine attributes also takes a definite humanistic turn in Shariati's thought. A basic idea of modern humanism is that the ultimate purpose of man is to serve man. In Islam, man serves himself and the humanity best by serving God. In practice the idea of the service of God has proved to be too subjective a principle to constitute a criterion for service to mankind. Good Muslims throughout history have served God but the Muslim humanity has not been much better for it. A great number of sincere Muslims have even sought the service of God outside society and in an inclusive relation with the divine. The thirteenth century Iranian Islamic humanist, Sa'di expressed this dilemma in the following poem:

Worship is but the service of humanity  
Not in the rosary, the prayer rug and the robe.

The search for a more explicit principle takes, in Shariati, the form of equating God and mankind. Shariati claims that the concepts of God and the humanity in the Quran are interchangeable when it relates to social themes. A purpose of the tawhidi world view is to end dualism of "service to God and service to man." However, in Shariati's view it is the service to mankind that is the most important criterion.

The mark of the ideal man in Islam is that he "seeks out mankind

and thus attains God."<sup>34</sup> [The ideal Muslim] does not perceive his perfection as lying in the creation of a private relation with God to the exclusion of men; it is rather in struggle for the perfection of the human race in enduring hardship, hunger, depravation and torment for the sake of the liberty, livelihood and well-being of men, in the furnace of the intellectual and social struggle that he attains piety, perfection and closeness to God.<sup>35</sup>

### Pragmatism

William James the American educator and philosopher called pragmatism "a new name for some old ways of thinking." Mehdi Bazargan the precursor of Shi'i modernism wholeheartedly agrees with this wisdom. In an essay entitled "Islam and Pragmatism," Bazargan cites James with approval and finds Islamic ideas and ideals in accord with his philosophy. Comparing Pragmatic definition of truth and Islamic idea of action, Bazargan concludes: Quran and Muslims are completely practical and demand from Muslims only practice and of course the kind of practice that is useful and has positive impact and result in life.<sup>36</sup> Shariati takes even a step farther and calls Islam as a "pragmatic vision" and a "pragmatic ideology." The idea that Islam should be approached with a view to practical result was first adopted by Abduh who, inspired by modern utilitarianism, invoked the medieval idea of maslaha (interest, expediency) as a central Islamic principle of social utility that should decide the direction of reform in Islamic thought and institutions.<sup>37</sup> Shi'ism rejects the Sunni concept of maslaha and the equivalent which it has developed for the same idea is so jurisprudentially involved that does not lend itself to easy popularization.<sup>38</sup> In the absence of the maslaha concept, Shi'i modernism puts pragmatism at the center of its approach to Islam. Shariati is not always consistent in taking a positive view of

pragmatism and its author William James. At times he finds it expedient to condemn pragmatism as a philosophy of deception and opportunism which has "the aroma of Americanism." Nonetheless, the influence of pragmatism on Shariati thought's is unmistakable. Like the author of pragmatism Shariati intensely disliked interminable metaphysical disputes and viewed action and positive result as the criteria for worth and validity of an idea. In Shariati's view, "the worth of a faith, an ideology or any thought and science is revealed at the level of action. Prior to practice...wrong or right thought, correct or incorrect religion, Islam or pragmatism, monotheism or polytheism, Shi'ism or Sunnism are all the same..."<sup>39</sup> However, Shariati accepts pragmatism only within the framework of Islam and therefore it cannot serve as a principle of choice among ideologies.

Shariati attributes the success of Islam to its ability to overcome the one-sidedness and elitism of the major world outlooks which prevailed at the dawn of Islam. Islam emerged when dominant world views were Greek rationalism and Eastern mysticism with Christianity having evolved as their byproduct. As such they were irrelevant to the practical life of the ordinary people. Islam affirmed both the rational and nonrational dimensions of human reality and thus ended the age-old dualism of intellect and intuition. However, the decisive characteristic of Islamic ideology was its "pragmatic characteristic."<sup>40</sup> Unlike these world views, Islam oriented itself to practical life and emphasized action over contemplation. Islam was able to conquer the hearts and minds of the adherents of various religions "not because of the Quran's lucidity or its

metaphysical truths"<sup>41</sup> which, Shariati points out, are indeed slender but because of Islam's emphasis on objective realities and its central concern with righteous leadership and social justice the absence of which people in despotic regimes and aristocratic empires suffered. The metaphysical debates and metaphysical disputes that engaged the Muslim intellectuals for centuries were foreign to the nature of Islam and entered the Islamic thought from other religions and cultures, Judaism and Hellenism in particular. As for the common people, left without concrete Islamic orientation to life, religious beliefs and practices became ends in themselves. Islam became "a religion for the sake of religion."

It should be clear from the foregoing that Shariati accepts Pragmatism only within the framework of Islam and rejects it as a principle for choice of ideologies. Within the parameters of Islamic ideology, Shariati puts forward a criterion of truth for assessing religious ideas much similar in its basic meaning to pragmatic idea of truth. According to Shariati, since Islam is a religion with practical aim for man's life on earth, a pragmatic orientation should be also the outlook of the believers in assessing various religious precepts and the interpretations given to them. Instead of trying to demonstrate the truth or falsity of an idea through philosophical or theological reasoning Shariati suggests "a criterion more certain from the standpoint of truth and more useful from the standpoint of social life."<sup>42</sup>

If you see that my understanding, for example, of the principle of imamat...has positive, constructive, and progressive impact for the person and the society that believes in that principle, then that understanding is correct. And if our understanding of

the same concept does not change our perspective and our social thinking we must doubt the correctness our view.<sup>43</sup>

Shariati views the principle of utility valid for "all the discourse concerning religion and Islam" but he particularly applies the idea to his unique interpretation of the Shi'i idea of the mahdi, the messiah which we will consider in the next chapter. Shariati dismisses as irrelevant the question of whether or not life of a millennium is a biological possibility. He notes the fact that the belief in Mahdi and his parousia is an integral part of the Shi'i faith. The relevant question is how to change the prevailing conception of the mahdi which gives the believer a sense of futility and despair into a principle of constructive hope and optimism.

Shariati has been criticized from a scientific standpoint for sacrificing the idea of objective truth to utility.<sup>44</sup> Such an external criticism misses the point. Shariati works from within a tradition in which objective reality is not the primary source of truth. In that tradition, divine truths as revealed to the Prophets and Imams and as understood by the past generations of Muslim intellectuals are the first order reality to which contemporary reality must submit. Mahdism is one such truth and as it is firmly rooted in Shi'i mind, it constitutes a psychological truth with definite impact on the life of the believer. As a believer, Shariati cannot be expected to deny that truth. As a concerned Muslim, Shariati's purpose is to bring the divine truth to bear on the objective interests of the believer and give him more control over the content of his mind. Shariati has also been criticized by the late theologian Motahhari for viewing Islam as means rather than as an end, as an expediency rather than truth.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, Motahhari's vision of Islam although more orthodox than Shariati's, is no less immune to the wisdom of Shah Waliullah, the founder of modern Islam in India, that religion, as William James was later to maintain, should be retained because it serves a useful purpose. This same spirit permeated Motahhari's recent writings including his explication of an Islamic world view much of which is inspired by Shariati's ideas.<sup>46</sup>

## CHAPTER IV

### NOTES

1. Shariati, CW. Vol. 19: Hossein, the Heir of Adam (Tehran: Qalam, 1982), P. 318.
2. Shariati, CW. Vol. 15: History and Study of Religions II (Tehran: Enteshar, 1983), P. 219.
3. Shariati, CW. Vol. 29: Meeting With Abraham (Tehran: Mona, 1982), P. 147
4. Ibid., PP. 14647.
5. Shariati, Islamology II, PP. 306307.
6. Shariati, Characteristics, P. 435.
7. Ibid., P. 438.
8. Shahrokh Akhavi, Religion and Politics, P. 149.
9. Ibid.
10. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 428.
11. Meeting with Abraham, P. 168.
12. Ibid.
13. Recognition, P. 245.
14. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966, P. 29. Fazlur Rahman's statement is quoted by Mazheruddin Siddique, "Intellectual Basis of Muslim Modernism-I," Islamic Studies 9: 2 (June 1970), P. 158. For the supposed implications of tawhid for equality of men and women see Tazimuddin Siddique, "Tawhid, Oneness of God, Studies in Islam 16, 2 (April 1979), P. 92. The whole issue of the journal is devoted to a reconsideration of the meaning and significance of tawhid in Islam.
15. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 221

16. Shariati, Hossein, P. 245.
17. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1979), P. 86.
18. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 226. Shariati's view of polytheism is similar to Nikolai Bukharin's idea of religion in general. Discussing the parallels between the Indian Caste system and Hinduism Bukharin writes: "The religious superstructure is, thus, determined by the material condition of human existence; its nucleus is the reflection of sociopolitical order of society." See Bukharin, Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology, trans. Alfred G. Meyer (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1969), P. 179.
19. Shariati, Eqbal, P. 49.
20. Shariati, CW, 22: Religion Against Religion (Tehran: Sabz, 1982), P. 137.
21. Shariati, CW, Vol. 15: History and Study of Religions II (Tehran: Qalam, 1982), P. 112.
22. Shariati, Hossein, P. 341.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., P. 180.
25. Shariati, Vol. 14: History and Study of Religions II, P. 229.
26. Shariati, World View and Ideology, PP. 229-30
27. Shariati, History and Study of Religions, P. 122.
28. Quoted by Edward Said in Orientalism (New York: Vintage Book, 1981), P. 297.
29. Islamology III, P. 297.
30. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 75.
31. E. Von Grunebaum, Modern Islam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), P. 52.
32. Shariati, Man Without Self, P. 131.
33. Shariati, History and Study of Religions I, P. 307.
34. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, P. 122.
35. Ibid.

36. Mehdi Bazargan, The Infinitesimals. Reproduced by Book Distribution Center, Houston, Texas, 1978, P.31.
37. Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1898-1939 (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), PP. 151-2.
38. Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), P. 170.
39. Shariati, Islamology II, PP.154-5.
40. Shariati, Meeting With Abraham, P. 659.
41. Shariati, Islamology II, PP. 135-36.
42. Shariati, Hossein, P. 270.
43. Ibid.
44. See Mangol Bayat-Philipp, "Shi'ism in Contemporary Iranian Politics: The Case of Ali Shariati" in Towards a Modern Iran, eds. Sylvia Haim and Elie Kedourie (London: Frank Cass, 1981), PP.155-168.
45. Morteza Motahhari, Islamic Movements in the Twentieth Century (Tehran: n.p., n.d.), P. 83.
46. See Motahhari, A Prolegomenon to the World View of Islam. 5 Volumes (Qum: Sadra, n.d.). There, Motahhari citing such figures as William James and Eric Fromm tries to persuade his readers of the psychological and social benefits of religion in the modern world.

## CHAPTER V

### A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Islamic history has much in common with the rest of human history. It is replete with conflict and war, oppression and injustice. Faced with the reality of Muslim history the present advocates of Islamic reform and revival accept nothing short of return to the pristine Islamic state which is said to have existed in the early years of Islam. Much of Islamic history is viewed as a deviation from true Islam. The deviation from Islam which is often cited as the cause of Muslim decline and disintegration is commonly explained in terms of corruption of morals and a gradual turning away of the community from God. In his approach to history Shariati goes beyond the theme of human depravity and moral corruption in order to explain the historical developments in Islam. Shariati's openness to alternative interpretations of history than traditionally offered by Muslim intellectuals and his Shi'ism, the creed of the wronged party in Islam, enable him to view the history of Islamic society like the history of mankind as a struggle between truth and falsehood in which class conflict is a major determinant and component.

Shariati calls his historical reflections, quite appropriately, a philosophy of history. In his view, history as an expression of God's will is not a mass of chance events but rather it is invested with His

sunna (norms) which he interprets as laws and regularities in human history the discovery of which enables man to understand the past and predict the future.<sup>1</sup> Shariati tries to reconcile the modern requirements of historical understanding with the exigencies of religious beliefs regarding the course of human history. He maintains that it is the task for the scientific historian to approach history without preconceptions and prejudices and come to an objective understanding of historical laws. But then, he argues that it will require "centuries" of work before the study of history can achieve the status of a precise science. Shariati's conclusion is that "since a science of history which is accepted by everyone is not as yet discovered, we approach [history] as a school of belief and designate it as philosophy [of history]."<sup>2</sup> Thus, what Shariati presents is an interpretive history informed by religious ideology. It is mithistoire, a mixture of history and myths the purpose of which is to give moral and ideological orientation. To justify his use of myth, Shariati does an about face and disregarding all that he says about the necessity of a scientific approach to history states: "I like mythology better than history and even believe that there is more truth in mythology than in history...Mythology is history as it should have been."<sup>3</sup>

Shariati's philosophy of history is based on the Quran as well as certain tenets of Shi'i doctrine. The idea of an Islamic philosophy of history, although a considerable contribution to the limited scope of contemporary Shi'i discourse, is not new in modern Muslim thought as there are quite a few Muslim writers who specialize in explicating the

Islamic views of history.<sup>4</sup> What is of special significance in Shariati's work is that he wants to derive from the Quran and other Islamic sources a view of history which, beyond the cyclical theory of rise and fall of civilizations first formulated by Ibn Khaldun and very popular with Muslim thinkers, can explain the sources of conflict and turmoil in human and Islamic history. Then, his approach is much closer to Marx than to Toynbee who enjoys great prestige among Muslim writers. A related dimension of Shariati's historical thought is that for him as for Marx it is the nas (people) and not "the creative minority" that is the prime agent of historical change, even though Shariati considers personality, chance, and historical laws as important determinants of social transformation.<sup>5</sup>

Shariati divides human history into two phases: the age of primitive communalism marked by human equality and solidarity and the age of social division and conflict. This is far less Marxian than it looks. He rejects the Marxian view of history on the ground of general validity as well as of relevance to much of human history, that is, the history of the East. Marx, Shariati maintains, did not apply consistent criteria for determination of historical periods. Primitive communism and modern communism are characterized by Marx by common ownership of the resources and means of production. If that is the criterion, then Shariati contends, there are only two modes of production relations and "infrastructures" in the whole of human history rather than five or six.<sup>6</sup> Shariati reaches a peculiar conclusion from the above observation: Underdeveloped societies do not have to go through capitalism, development of productive forces, and

socialization of human activities. They can adopt socialism at any stage of socioeconomic development.<sup>7</sup> Shariati's second criticism concerns the relevance of Marxian categories to the East.<sup>8</sup> He criticizes certain Iranian Marxists for trying to forcibly fit the Iranian and Eastern history into Marxian frames despite Marx's own reservations regarding the history of the East. He labels these Marxists as mindless imitators. Interestingly enough, Shariati takes up the task of teaching them the method of creative Marxism:

The discerning and scientific imitator is he who acquires the method and on the basis of the concepts of dialectical contradiction and dialectical movement of history and historical determinism examines and reconstructs the course of historical transformations in the Eastern society and formulates an alternative philosophy of history than that presented by Marx...<sup>9</sup>

As we shall see, this is more or less the method of approach adopted by Shariati in his formulation of an Islamic philosophy of history. While Shariati takes his methodological clue from dialectical thought, which he believes to be deeply rooted in the Eastern and religious outlook,<sup>10</sup> he derives the substance of his idea of history from the Quran.

People were one nation; then God sent forth the Prophets...and he sent down with them the book with the truth, that He might decide between the people touching their differences. (2:213)

The first part of the verse constitutes the foundation stone of Shariati's philosophy of history. The statement according to Shariati makes reference to a period of history when unity and harmony prevailed in human society and social division due to race, class and family were absent. He calls this the period of primitive socialism. In this period, men worked and lived collectively in groups and tribes. The main forms of production were fishing, hunting and food gathering. The

instruments of production were either non-existent or extremely primitive so that everyone had access to tools of work and therefore to all the available means of livelihood.

Since the instruments of work and source of food production and the means of livelihood were accessible to all, all individuals were brothers because they were equals. This is the period of social ownership and social life of humanity.<sup>11</sup>

Primitive socialism represents man's pre-history or, as one might call it, "the state of nature" since Shariati's discussion is quite reminiscent of Rousseau's language in A Discourse on the Origin of Human Inequality. In fact, Shariati's account of this pristine state is inspired much more by Rousseau's work than any precisely Marxian view of primitive communism. There is not only similarity of ideas and sequence of events between Shariati's description and Rousseau's discourse but also, in some places, similarity of wordings. As for Rousseau, for Shariati, human society begins from the "day that a piece of land that had been owned in common was taken from nature and became the exclusive right of one person to the exclusion of all others..."<sup>12</sup> The development of agriculture and ownership of land as well as the instruments of production mark the beginning of the end of "unitary society" and the introduction of inequality, oppression and conflict in human relations. Like Rousseau, Shariati views the factor of force as principally responsible for the emergence of inequality.

At this critical point in history, the exact opposite of Marx's theory applies; it is not ownership that is a factor in the acquisition of power, but the converse. Power and coercion were the factor that first bestowed ownership on the individuals. Power brought about private ownership, and then in turn, private ownership bestowed permanence on power and strengthened it by making it something legal and natural.<sup>13</sup>

In the religious story of Cain and Abel, Shariati finds a symbolic

representation of the historical transition and its social consequences. It should be noted that the Quran makes only elliptic reference to this Old Testament story. It mentions offerings made to God by sons of Adam, God's rejection of one of them, and the subsequent slaying.<sup>14</sup> Later, the Islamic commentators have identified the sons of Adam as Cain and Abel and the offerings as corn and camel respectively. From the nature of the offerings, Shariati deduces that Abel and Cain have different occupations, a deduction made unnecessary by the fact that in the Old Testament Abel is said to be a keeper of sheep and Cain a tiller of the land, (apparently Shariati did not wish to make direct reference to the Torah which along with the New testament are considered to be "abrogated" by the Quran.) Then, Shariati farther infers that Abel and Cain are representatives of two opposing social systems. The murder of Abel at the hand of Cain signifies the end of an historical era in the life of man and ushers in the era of exploitation and conflict: The contradiction begins with the killing of Abel by Cain.

Now, in my opinion, Abel represents the age of pasture-based economy, of the primitive socialism that precedes [private] ownership, and Cain represents the system of agriculture, and individual or monopoly ownership. Thereafter a permanent war began so that the whole of history became the stage for struggle between the party of Cain the killer, and the party of Abel, his victim or, in other words, the ruler and the ruled.<sup>15</sup>

The story of Cain and Abel has been an important source of social thought in Western intellectual history. In his City of God, St. Augustine sketched the course of history as one of struggle between city of God and city of the devil represented by Abel and Cain respectively, a struggle which will end with the ultimate triumph of

the heavenly city.<sup>16</sup> A more recent interpretation of the story comes from Miguel de Unamuno, the Spanish existentialist philosopher in whose thought Cain becomes "the roving husbandsman, the first to found cities, the father of industry, envy, and community life."<sup>17</sup> One cannot, of course, assume Shariati's knowledge of these Western interpretations of the story Cain and Abel even though Shariati was aware of the Freudian interpretation and expressly rejected it.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the similarities as well differences are quite interesting. The theme of envy is central to Unamuno's thought and to his interpretation of the story. He was much influenced by Friedrich Nietzsche who stood Marx's idea of class struggle on its head by declaring it an expression of resentment of the lower classes against their natural masters. Shariati interprets the encounter between Cain and Abel as a symbolic representation of class conflict rather of personal envy. He rejects the traditional Islamic view that the story is "a simple ethical tale" bearing an injunction against murder.<sup>19</sup> To Shariati the story's deeper meaning signifies the conflict between two modes of life and outlook. However, Shariati is no less impressed than Augustine with the ethical implication of this religious tale. Thus, the conflict between the brothers involves social and moral as well as economic outlook and interest. The system of Cain is not only a system of acquisition and exploitation but also one of domination and deception, whereas the system of Abel is based on solidarity, compassion and good faith. In order to win God's favor in their dispute, Cain and Abel were to make sacrifice to God. Cain took some weathered corn which was not accepted while Abel offered his most precious possession which was accepted.

Thus, Cain practiced treachery and made mockery of his own belief and principles. Finally submitting to his passions and in total disregard for God's moral command, he murdered his brother. Shariati cites the Quranic dialogue between Abel and Cain as the archetypical example of the encounter between the two orientations of aggression and compassion. When Cain threatens Abel with death, the latter "replies softly, kindly and : 'but I will not raise my hand against you'."<sup>20</sup> Thus, according to Shariati, the conflict of Cain and Abel is between truth and falsehood, between the religion of monotheism (worship of one truth) and polytheism (worship of wealth, power or the self). The conflict is at the same time a manifestation of man's own inner dualism and contradiction. Abel and its progeny represent man's theomorphic nature whereas Cain and its progeny manifest man's base and animal dimension.

According to Shariati, history as the story of man's becoming involves the overcoming of the structures of Cain in all of its economic, social and moral aspects. Prophets were sent precisely for the purpose of guiding mankind to achieve unity, justice and goodness. Division of society into two hostile groups and the appearance of two irreconcilable outlooks was the chief reason for the coming of the prophets. The aim of all prophetic missions was to establish unity and morality in human relations.

Indeed, We sent Our Messenger with the clear signs and We sent down with them the book and the balance so that men might uphold justice. (Quran, 57:25)

Beside citing this and similar Quranic verses,<sup>21</sup> Shariati also refers to the humble social background of the Abrahamic prophets the

majority of whom were shepherds, fishermen, and simple craftsmen. He contrasts this with the prophets and sages such as Buddha, Confucius and Zoroaster who came from aristocratic and princely stock.<sup>22</sup>

Shariati's third reason is that the prophets always confronted the organized wealth and power as the main opposition to their mission. David confronted the Nebuchadnezzar; Abraham the Nymrod; Moses the Pharaoh; Jesus the Roman empire and finally Muhammad opposed the Quraysh aristocracy and the Persian and the Byzantine empires.<sup>23</sup>

We sent no warner into any city except its men who lived at ease said: We disbelieve in the message you have been sent with. (Quran, 34:34)

The foregoing constitutes the basis for Shariati's interpretation of Islamic history. Like all the prophetic movements, Islam was a revolution against oppression and injustice. From the beginning it came into an irreconcilable conflict with Quraysh aristocracy and the Meccan ruling class which was at the same time the guardian of the houses of worship. It was the poor, the down-trodden, and the slaves that gladly embraced Islam and flocked to Muhammad's mission. And when the message of Islam reached the subjects of the Persian empire, they freely abandoned their oppressive and corrupt ruling classes to embrace Islam, which promised righteous leadership and equality. Shariati's approach to historical facts is naturally ideological and selective. For example, among those who joined Muhammad's mission there were many prominent members of the Quraysh aristocracy who retained their fortunes as Muslims. Also, the fall of the Byzantine and Persian empires and the expansion of Islam had as much to do with the democratic message of Islam as the exhaustion of these empires.

after years of internal and external strife. A central factor was the deflection of the peripheral subjects of these empires who preferred to pay tribute to their own Arab kinsmen than to be crushed by a united Arab army.

The community which the Prophet Muhammad founded in Medina is viewed by Muslims as the ideal society for all mankind. Unfortunately historical writing is very thin on this most venerated period of Islamic history. Shariati's own account of the Prophet's life is characteristically limited to a description of Muhammad's campaigns and personal conduct. It is true, however, that the early Muslim community was by far more egalitarian than the systems that preceded or followed Muhammad's mission. Islam's message of brotherhood and mutual help surely helped to heal the social divisions introduced into the Arab society by the commercialization of Meccan economic life. Muhammad's even greater contribution was the introduction of law and order into a society torn by constant feud and warfare. The Prophet's magnetic personality was a critical factor in establishing a considerable measure of political cooperation and social solidarity among Arab tribes. It should also be mentioned that the Medina was a small community of a few thousand inhabitants at the most and enjoyed a relative abundance of wealth. Despite these advantages the Prophetic community cannot be said to have been a community without disorders and without poverty. The perspective that upholds Medina as the ideal community and explains the later reversal of the fortune of Islam by human depravity must believe in the suppression of human nature during the Prophetic mission and thus in

the inevitability of decline in the absence of the Prophet. Shariati, however, views the Medinan community not as a completed and perfect social order but the nucleus of such an order. The mission of Islam is the liberation of mankind from subjection to all spiritual and material forces besides God. The fulfillment of this mission required a fundamental transformation of old order and its system of values, a process that the Prophet successfully initiated but could not have consummated in his own lifetime. He created new institutions and above all left as legacy the Book and his tradition. It was the responsibility of the Companions to continue the revolutionary process and fulfill the Islamic ideal. However, the aristocratic tendency that had always existed in Islam came to the foreground after the death of the Prophet and the companions became divided into left and right wings as has happened in all revolutions.<sup>24</sup>

#### The Umayyad Counterrevolution

The issue of succession to the Prophet is a source of fundamental disagreement between the Shi'i and Sunni Muslims and a subject of much historiographical and theological debate. We will have occasion to discuss the relevance of this disagreement for contemporary Islamic political theory. Here, I briefly present Shariati's unique contribution to this historical debate and comment on its adequacy. In Shariati's interpretation, Abu Bakr, the chosen successor to the Prophet although a devout Companion and a man whose brief rule did not involve serious deviations, was used as a frontman by the Quraysh aristocracy. The latter, by nominating and supporting a candidate acceptable to themselves as well as to the most members of the Islamic

nobility present at Saqifa were able to prevent Ali the most consistent champion of Islamic piety and justice, from succeeding the Prophet and completing the tasks of the revolution.<sup>25</sup> The rich and prosperous merchants both in their collectivity and in the force of their representative Abdul Rahman Awf, himself a rich merchant, were instrumental in the appointment of Umar, the second Caliph and the selection of Uthman, the third Caliph as well. With Uthman the counterrevolution abandoned all pretension and with open assistance from Uthman assumed one position of power after another until it established itself at the helm of Islamic state and society. Thus, the Umayyads, the most diehard and persistent enemies of Islam, became heirs to the legacy of the Islamic revolution.<sup>26</sup>

Shariati explains the rise of Uthman and his Umayyad clan to Islamic rulership by what he calls the historical law of "the usurpation of Caliphate." According to this law, every revolution in its attempt to establish a new social order and new set of social values confronts the "dominant class" or the guardian of the old order. The latter puts up fierce resistance in order to crush the young movement. However, once it anticipates total defeat the old ruling class or a section of it submits to the revolutionary power. Furthermore, the members of the old dominant class, because of their special capacities, come to assume important roles and responsibilities in the revolution. Having disappeared for a time behind the revolutionary mask and revolutionary rhetoric they make use of every weakness in the movement and its leadership to gain power and make the new order responsive to their own needs and interests. Gradually, the

very class whose destruction was the aim of the revolution comes to define the aims of the revolution.<sup>27</sup>

By the old dominant class Shariati means the family of Abu Sufyan, the Umayyads, the archenemies of Muhammad who finally recognized the power of Islam and soon became the most effective administrators and beneficiaries to the bounties of Islamic conquests. What Shariati's explanation leaves out is the fact that the Umayyads did not make a secret of their ambition and aspirations and their rise to power and prosperity did not begin with Uthman but with the Prophet himself and continued under Abu Bakr and Umar. Al-Maqrizi (1363-1442), a Muslim historian and a devout Sunni was also puzzled by the rise to power of the Umayyads whom he condemns as having "governed tyrannically" and "oppressed people." However al-Maqrizi found the root cause of Umayyads' ascendancy to be the Prophets's own policy of appointing the prominent members of this family to the leading posts in the new regime. Citing these appointments, al-Maqrizi concludes:

Now since the messenger of God had laid such a foundation as this and had placed the Banu Umayya so prominently in the public eye by appointing them as his governors in the conquered provinces, how should their ambitions not be strengthened, their desires not be given free rein and their hopes of securing executive power not be sharpened?<sup>28</sup>

Shariati's view of Umayyad's ascendancy in terms of class conspiracy does not stand up to historical evidence. His argument that the members of Abu Sufyan's family came to prominent positions due to their special capacities as administrators and military men leads only to the conclusion that Shariati in his idealization of Islam does not wish to accept that between the exigencies of power and niceties of ideals there is an inherent tension that not even prophets have been

able to resolve. The individuals like Awf, Talha, Zubair and sa'd ibn Abi Viqas whom Shariati ranks with Umayyads as members of the old dominant class and in fact did come to amass great fortunes in cattle, land, and slaves, were among the early converts to Islam. They were trusted companions of the Prophet and rendered valuable services to Muhammad in the struggle against his adversaries.<sup>29</sup> If we accept Shariati's interpretation of Islam, the inescapable conclusion would be that in appointing such dubious individuals to leading positions, Prophet must have felt serious tension between the desire to spread the truth of Islam and the practical requirements of establishing a viable state.

Nevertheless, Shariati's class analysis of historical events which occurred after the death of the Prophet and the rift between Ali and his adversaries is by far superior to the view that attributes the misfortunes of Islam to human wickedness or as in the case of Sayyed Qutb, the Egyptian Islamic reformer, to "the errors" of an aging Uthman. Qutb writes: "I am certain that if the life of Umar had lasted several years longer or Ali had been the third Caliph or even if Uthman had become Caliph when he was twenty years younger, then the course of Islamic history would have been very considerably changed..."<sup>30</sup> Further, Qutb concedes that Umar throughout his reign had discriminated in distribution of stipends among the believers but at the end of his life had come to know his error and decided "to take excessive wealth from the rich and give it to the poor for such excess of wealth had grown up in most cases from the discrimination in stipend which he himself had established."<sup>31</sup> To Shariati, these policies were

the results not of individual errors of judgement but the natural outcome of the aristocratic leanings of the first two Caliphs which made them responsive to the pressures and demands of the old dominant class.<sup>32</sup> While Shariati defends Abu Bakr and Umar against the vilifications of Shi'i clerics, a position which caused him the most difficulty with the less enlightened Shi'i apologists, he nevertheless believes that because of their old ties and private ambitions, Abu Bakr and Umar became the instruments of those vested interests that were preparing to destroy the Islamic revolution from within. It is significant that what Qutb, a Sunni Muslim, says about Ali and his five year rule corroborates Shariati's contention that Ali was a persistent champion of the Islamic left in early Islam. Qutb quotes Ali's statement to the faithful that "you are the servants of Allah and property is the property of Allah to be divided equally among you, so no one has better claim than any other. But those who show piety toward Allah shall have the best rewards."<sup>33</sup> For Qutb the real tragedy of Islam was that "Ali was not the Third Caliph."<sup>34</sup> For Shariati, the tragedy began at Saqifa where Islam as a system of metaphysical beliefs won but as a social mission failed.<sup>35</sup>

Shi'ism for Shariati is not just one branch of Islam among others but an orientation that represents the progressive spirit of Islam. By Shi'ism Shariati does not mean all the ritual and theological beliefs that have come to be known as Shi'ism. He characterizes the dominant Shi'ism of his own time as Safavi Shi'ism with no better claim to Islam than its counterpart Amavi (Umayyad) Sunnism. He has the greatest praise for Abu Hanifa and Ibn Hanbal, the leading theologians of the

tenth century who opposed the ruling Caliphs and were consequently imprisoned, and even considers Mahatma Gandhi a better Shi'i than some of the grand Ayatollahs.<sup>36</sup> Shi'ism, according to Shariati is above all the active belief that the movement which began with Prophets for man's spiritual and social liberation must continue. Like Islam itself, Shi'ism as a legatee of the Islamic revolution began with a "no," a historical refusal to go along with the misconception at Saqifah which eventually led to the degeneration and destruction of the Muslim community.<sup>37</sup>

In sum, Shi'ism is the belief that the struggle that Mohammad began against polytheism, usury, aristocracy and capitalism continues after Mohammad under the guidance and leadership of Ali, his companions and heir...either in the form of passive resistance and non-cooperation with the Caliphal establishment or in the form of armed rebellion. In the view of Islam, this is a battle that began from the time of Adam between the poles of money and force, on the one hand, and suffering and poverty, on the other.<sup>38</sup>

For Shi'ism besides the period of Prophet, Ali's five year government is the ideal period in the history of Islam. Historically it is true that Ali came to power with the enthusiastic support of the lower classes as well as those who had political grievances against Uthman's rule and his Umayyad appointees. Shariati praises Ali for the fact that he stopped the process of Islamic expansion and conquest initiated by Umar and engaged himself in the class struggle on the home front.<sup>39</sup> This orientation was not limited to Ali but included those companions of the prophets who either due to their class origins or a deep understanding of Islam continued the struggle against political oppression and class inequality.<sup>40</sup>

A central place in Shariati's philosophy of history is given to

the martyrdom of Hossein, Ali's son and the third Shi'i Imam at the hand of the umayyad army in the first Islamic century. This tragic event more than anything has historically contributed to the development of Shi'ism as a distinct Islamic orientation and to the change of its nature from that of political activism to one of (mostly) pietistic quietism. The martyrdom of Hossein which initially led to a number of armed revolts against the Umayyad regime gradually turned into a theodicy of suffering in which remembrance of the event and weeping were believed to secure the Imam's intercession and hence the salvation of the faithful. With the passage of time a number of ceremonies and practices such as self-flagellation for the cause of the Martyr were added to the acts of remembrance and weeping. Throughout the Shi'i history the clerics and rulers (with the exception of the Pahlavis) sought to facilitate these ceremonies which enhanced their legitimacy in the eyes of the believers. The potentiality of Hossein's martyrdom as an example of revolt against tyranny and injustice remained largely untapped until recently.

With the emergence of Khomeini as opposition leader and with development of the Shi'i "reform" movement in the early 1960's, the Shi'i intellectuals and clerics began to reconsider the meaning and significance of this historic event in order to utilize its ideological and political implications. To this attempt at reconsideration Shariati made an original and decisive contribution. He subjected the Shi'i traditional understanding of the event as well as the rituals and ceremonies associated with it to scathing criticisms. It was most tragic, he said, that the most heroic act in the whole of human and

Islamic history had become only an occasion for weeping and self-abnegation. The tragedy of Hossein was at best conceived as an isolated event peculiar to Shi'i history without any relation to human and Islamic history.<sup>41</sup> In Shariati's view, Hossein's revolt was a natural assertion of his role as a torch bearer and legatee of the prophetic revolutions. It signified the negation not merely of Yazid's legitimacy to rule but of the whole sociocultural order of which Yazid's rulership was a political expression. Thus, Shariati rejected the merely political interpretations according to which Hossein's revolt was an attempt to overthrow the Yazid's regime.<sup>42</sup> Shariati gives a vivid, albeit anachronistic, description of the social order at the time, drawing many parallels between the attitudes and orientations of the masses, the clergy, and the intellectuals then and in his own time.<sup>43</sup> The rise of Hossein, he concludes, was a symbolic revolution which aim was to awaken the masses and prepare the groundwork for a profound social revolution.<sup>44</sup>

According to Shariati, the Shi'i community after Imam Ali and Imam Hossein continued to represent the progressive ideals of Islam until the ascension of the Safavids to power in the seventeenth century. With the adoption of Shi'ism as the state religion and the incorporation of the Shi'i ulama into the state, Shi'ism became a conservative and even counterrevolutionary movement and ideology. Shariati presents no evidence from the words and deeds of the Imams or the activities of the Shi'i community prior to the Safavids to support his view of Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology. While Shariati devotes volumes of his work to Imam Hossein's revolt and martyrdom, he

has only scanty pages covering centuries of Shi'i history. Shariati views the voluntary abdication of Imam Hassan, the second Shi'i Imam, the noninvolvement of the most of the Imams in the sociopolitical movements of their time, and the acceptance by the eighth Imam of the offer to become the Caliph Ma'mun's successor as simply the strategic maneuvers of a revolutionary party dictated by the circumstances of the struggle.<sup>45</sup>

When it comes to the explanation of "Safavid Shi'ism," Shariati's perspective changes from that of class to institutional analysis. Social movements, Shariati observes, becomes conservative and even counterrevolutionary once they attain state power. He gives examples drawn from Zoroastrianism to modern socialism to demonstrate this sociological law. This, in Shariati's view, is also what happened when Shi'ism became a state ideology in the Safavid state.<sup>46</sup> The Shi'i minority who had always been persecuted and oppressed, lost its revolutionary and oppositional character.<sup>47</sup> This certainly makes nonsense of Shariati's claim regarding the transformative mission of Islam, for if Islam is subject to the so called law of social movements, the establishment of righteous leadership and social justice on earth belongs to the realm of utopia.

Shariati is unique among Muslim intellectuals to admit the failure of historical Islam to liberate humanity or even the Muslim community. In his view, the ruling powers that have predominated Islamic reality have suppressed and even distorted the substance of Islamic truth. This idea may appear self-defeating given that Shariati resorts to historical laws to explain the major shifts in the fortune

of Islam and Shi'ism. Given this historical reality should we then assume the defeat of Islamic mission and declare an end of Islamic ideology? Shariati's response is clearly in the negative. Such a conclusion, he would respond, is based on very selective and narrow view of the historical process. It is true that the dominant groups in history have employed religion in general and Islam in particular in the service of their interests.<sup>48</sup> But then this is true of all ideologies and modes of thought. This cannot be a basis for the negation of the truth of Islam. Second, despite the success of the dominant classes to manipulate Islam, the ideals of righteous leadership and social justice have never ceased to inspire the struggles of the oppressed. Here, we come to the crux of Shariati's philosophy of history. Shariati views the contemporary egalitarian social movements throughout the world as being inspired by the same ideals and directed toward the same goals as the earlier prophetic movements. What Shariati finds most significant in the modern egalitarian movements is the conviction in the "inevitable victory of justice in the world," a clear reference to the Marxian idea of historical inevitability of classless society.<sup>49</sup> To Shariati, it must have felt like a revelation to find a connection between a major premise of Marxian socialism and the biblical as well as the Quranic promise regarding the ultimate sovereignty of the meek and the oppressed

Yet We desired to be gracious to those that were disinherited in the land, and to make them leader, and to make them the inheritors. (Quran, 28:5)

Marx's view of history, according to Karl Lowith, was inspired by

"the religious spirit of prophetism." Drawing a number of parallels between Marx's ideas and JewishChristian doctrine, Lowith concludes: "...the whole process of history as outlined in the Communist Manifesto corresponds to the general scheme of Jewish-Christian interpretation of history as a providential advance toward a final goal which is meaningful."<sup>50</sup> There is every indication in his writings that Shariati was familiar with this line of critique made against Marxism by the European intellectuals. It is not at all far-fetched to assume that Shariati, having discovered the supposed connection between messianism and the most powerful egalitarian movement in modern history, must have thought along the following lines: If the biblical promise and the idea of the Second Coming had generated such powerful intellectual and social movements in Western history, there is no reason why the Quranic promise and the idea of the Mahdi's parousia should not perform the same feat for Shi'i Islam, the most perfect of Abrahamic religions. Shariati employs both ideas in order to give a progressive and optimistic vision of the future and underscore the responsibility of the faithful for the realization of that future. According to this messianic vision, in spite of human history and centuries of contradiction between the Islamic truth and the Islamic reality, the Islamic ideals of justice will ultimately prevail. The conflict which began with Cain and Abel at the dawn of human history and for the resolution of which all the prophets and the Imams were commissioned by God will end in the inevitable victory of the oppressed:

This is the inevitable direction of history. A universal revolution will take place in all areas of human life: the oppressed classes of history will take their revenge. The glad tidings of God will be realized: 'We have willed that We should

place under obligation those who have been weakened and oppressed on the earth by making them the leaders and heirs to the earth.<sup>51</sup>

However, the Shi'i idea of Mahdi does not readily lend itself to an optimistic view of the future. Shi'i Mahdism like Christian messianism has often been a source and a manifestation of despair and disenchantment with the world. From a social and political standpoint the concept of awaiting the savior has been throughout most of Islamic Shi'i history, as Hamid Enayat observes, "a sanctifying tenet for the submissive acceptance of the status quo."<sup>52</sup> One of Shariati's novel contribution to the ideologization of Shi'i Islam was to reinterpret the Shi'i idea of Messianism. He sharply criticized the traditional conception of entezar, a term used to denote the Shi'i expectation of the Mahdi's return, and characterized it as "negative expectancy," a device by means of which every form of oppression and injustice was justified and all responsibility for change and improvement removed from the believer. In negative expectancy it is not only inconceivable but also undesirable to better the state of the world since in a world without wrongs the idea of a hidden Imam and his parousia would lose all significance. The meaning of Awaiting the savior in true Shi'ism, according to Shariati, is one of positive expectancy. It is a "religion of protest" against oppressive conditions and it entails "the absolute negation" of the those conditions.<sup>53</sup> It is an optimistic and future oriented concept. Shariati does not make any attempt to locate his interpretation in the mainstream tradition of Shi'i thought and practice. Instead, he draws parallels between his idea of Mahdism and historical determinism, a comparison which he finds "infinitely exciting for those who are

familiar with scientific philosophies of history.<sup>54</sup> As historical determinism which is "itself a form of expectancy" does not make its believers "irresponsible and limpish," neither should the expectation of the Mahdi.

## CHAPTER V

### NOTES

1. Shariati, Islamology: Lectures 1-2 (Tehran: Ershad 1971), P. 38.
2. Ibid., P. 39.
3. Shariati, Islamology: Lectures 3-5 (Tehran: Ershad, 1971), P. 27.
4. For modern Islamic ideas of history see Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Contemporary Islam and the Challenge of History (Albany: New York University Press, 1982).
5. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, P. 50.
6. Ibid., PP. 112-14.
7. Ibid., P. 114.
8. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 19.
9. Ibid., P. 20.
10. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 188.
11. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 284-5.
12. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, P. 100.
13. Ibid.
14. The Quran, 5: 30-34.
15. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, P. 98.
16. See Bertrand Russell, A History of Western Philosophy (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1945), P. 36.
17. Miguel de Unamuno, Abel Sanchez and Other Stories, trans. Anthony Kerrigan, (Chicago: Henry Regenry, 1956), P. 73.

18. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, PP. 107-8.
19. Ibid., P. 103.
20. Ibid., P. 105.
21. Shariati missed an important verse in the Quran in support of his thesis: In the verse 11: 87 the people of the Prophet Shu'aib ask him: "Shu'aib, do your prayers order you that we should give up these [idols]... or that we should desist from doing with our wealth what we please?"
22. Shariati, Hossein, the Legatee of Adam, PP. 127-28.
23. The view that the Prophets were revolutionary leaders of the oppressed class was also held by the Marxist Karl Kautsky in his The Origin of Christianity. Cited by Bryan S. Turner in Weber and Islam (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), P. 27.
24. Shariati, World View and Ideology, P. 118.
25. Shariati, Hossein, P. 133.
26. Shariati, The Unjust, the Disobedient, and the Faithless, PP. 57-58.
27. Ibid., PP. 66-71.
28. Quoted by C. E. Bosworth, "Al-Maqrizi's Exposition of the formative Period in Islamic History and its Cosmic Significance: The Kitab an-Niza' Wa-t-takhasum" in Islam: Past Influence and Present Challenge (New York: New York University Press, 1979), P. 98.
29. For an account of the wealth accumulated by the Islamic Arab aristocracy in early Islam see Bernard Lewis, Islam in History: Ideas, Men, and Events in the Middle East (New York: Library Press, 1973), PP. 243-244.
30. Sayed Kotb [Sayyid Qutb], Social Justice in Islam, trans. John B. Hardie (Washington, D.C.: American Council of Learned Societies, 1953), P. 229.
31. Ibid., P. 212.
32. Shariati, The Unjust, PP. 195-200.
33. Qutb, Social Justice, P. 212.
34. Ibid., P. 194.
35. Shariati, Shi'ism, PP. 188-189.

36. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 5.
37. Shariati, Shi'ism, P. 258.
38. Shariati, Hossein, the Legatee of Adam, PP. 360-61
39. Shariati, The Unjust, PP. 142-43.
40. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 44.
41. Shariati, Hossein, PP. 126-7.
42. The interpretation that the event of Imam Hossein's Martyrdom was a definite attempt by the third Imam to overthrow the Umayyad regime was put forward by Salehi Najaf-abadi and it is analyzed by Hamid Enayat in his Modern Islamic Political Thought, PP. 191-194. Here I only add the point that such an interpretation was clearly inspired by Khomeini's theory of Islamic Government as it was endorsed and prefaced by Ayatollah Ali Montazari, the would be successor to Khomeini. Shariati made explicit reference to the book and rejected the interpretation.
43. Shariati, Hossein, P. 157.
44. Ibid., P. 361, footnote 1.
45. Shariati, Shi'ism, PP. 157-166.
46. Shariati, Alid Shi'ism, Safavid Shi'ism (Tehran: Ershad, 1972), PP. 35-40.
47. Ibid., P. 41-42.
48. Shariati, World View and Ideology, PP. 118-19.
49. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 9.
50. Karl Lowith, Meaning in History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), P. 45.
51. Shariati, On the Sociology of Islam, P. 109.
52. Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought, P. 25.
53. Shariati, Hossein, P. 303.
54. Ibid., 293.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATIONALISM AND REVOLUTION

#### Tradition, Modernity, and Revolution

The most striking feature of the Iranian revolution was the religious nature of its ideology and leadership. This fact assumes special significance when it is seen against the background of one half century of efforts by the Pahlavi regimes to modernize Iran and remove the religious influence on society and politics. Just as the task seemed to be near completion and Iran was heading towards modernity and "a Great Civilization," as the late Shah liked to call his image of the Iran's future, there emerged "a sacred movement," as Imam Khomeini described it, "one hundred percent Islamic...founded by the able hand of the clerics alone with the support of the great Islamic nation."<sup>1</sup> The religious character of the movement and its ideology came as shock not only to the outside observers but also to the secular groups and parties which were supposed to have an intimate understanding of the Iranian society. To be sure, some political groups had anticipated the impending crisis of autocracy but what they had hoped for and expected was a secular revolution for independence, democracy and socialism. To most of these groups a religious movement with demands for a religious republic seemed an unacceptable aberration. The monarchists still believe that Khomeini's rise to power was the result of a conspiracy by

the United States and Britain to end the Shah's rule. The idea of conspiracy is also held by many Iranian leftists who maintain that the West especially the United States promoted Islam and Khomeini as bulwark against the threats of Marxism and socialism. The liberal groups believe that the Revolution began as a secular demand for political freedom and social justice a course that came to be diverted from its path by the clergy which superimposed its own slogans and leadership on the movement. It seems, in retrospect, that the secular opposition had missed something important about the character of the Iranian society and the mood of the Iranian masses. This is, at least, what Shariati's critique of the Iranian intellectuals and his characterization of the Iranian society leads one to believe. He is the only Iranian intellectual who had anticipated such a future for Iran. In 1972, in a long essay addressed to his father, Shariati writes:

This [intellectual] movement which is rapidly conquering the conscience of the young generation and, more importantly, which waves are enveloping the religious and the traditional masses of the people even the Bazaar and the countryside is preparing the ground for a deep and great social movement based on the revolutionary ideology of Islam... and when the circumstances are favorable, it will crystallize into a real constructive and transformative resurgence. Fortunately, the natural and inevitable course of history and time favors this change and nothing can stop it.<sup>2</sup>

What Shariati could not foresee was that the revolution would occur so early, that his ideals of Islam would constitute not the consciousness of the revolution but only its slogans. Shariati had hoped that his new vision of Islam would so permeate the mass consciousness that people would no longer follow the clergy as Moqallehs (imitators) but act as conscious agents of historical

transformation.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the direction of Shariati's vision of the Iranian future is unmistakable. What is significant is that this vision which permeates all of Shariati's works is not based on merely faith and but on a certain understanding of the Iranian society. Shariati's social class background and orientation which kept him in close contact with the traditional lower and middle classes in Iranian society as well as his grounding in sociological understanding of society enabled him to observe a powerful current of thought and behavior that the secular Iranian intellectuals, left or liberal, failed to see or dismissed as insignificant. Shariati insisted that the spirit of "classicism" was alive and growing in Iranian society but "unfortunately our intellectuals who see through Western artificial eyes cannot recognize it, do not see it, or analyze it with a superficial and modernistic perspective."<sup>4</sup> It is very interesting that at the same time that Shariati wrote these lines, an Iranian Marxist theoretician could say that "religionists exaggerate the religious influence over the masses and do not take into account the role of social transformations in weakening the status of religion in society."<sup>5</sup> Shariati's works were mostly dismissed by Iranian intellectuals and viewed not as serious works of social analysis. In this connection the attitude of Bagher Mo'meni, a Marxist social historian of national significance is symptomatic. When asked about Shariati and his ideas in a public gathering shortly before the revolution he responded politely but with a concealed contempt: "I am black-faced that I have not read anything from Shariati because I did not imagine that what he dealt with had anything to do with sociology

and history."<sup>6</sup> Although Shariati did not write or teach systematic history and sociology in the objective academic sense, he brought a great number of social scientific concepts and ideas to bear on an understanding of Islam and Iranian society. These gave Shariati's views sharper focus as well as credibility in the eyes of his audience. Here, we are mainly concerned with Shariati's conception of Iranian society, his view of its fundamental tensions and conflicts as well as the general direction in which these conflicts will come to a resolution.

Shariati's cardinal criticism of the Iranian sociologists both academic and Marxist was that they approached Iranian society as an instance of society in general and applied to it categories and generalizations arrived at in the studies of Western history and society. Thus, these intellectuals sought to find in Iran the same social formations, conflicts, and dynamics of change as they had encountered in their readings and observations about societies elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> The Iranian intellectuals had taken too seriously the claims that Marxism or sociology had discovered the general laws of social change even though increasing number of Marxists and sociologists were disclaiming such discoveries that permeated the nineteenth century social thought.<sup>8</sup> Western social perspectives, Shariati argued, were at best useful insights which should be learned and even employed in efforts to understand one's own society but without any predetermined certainty regarding their relevance. The correct approach to Western sociological knowledge and to the Iranian society, according to Shariati was:

...to familiarize oneself with modern scientific schools of thought and ideologies but then put them aside and make a fresh start to come to a direct and independent understanding of one's own society, culture, religion and people [albeit] with the aid of scientific methods and perspectives of modern sociology...<sup>9</sup>

While it incorrect to speak of "the overriding influence" of any particular sociologist on his thinking, Shariati found the concepts of Gurvitchian sociology specially helpful to his understanding of Iranian society. It could be said, alternatively, that Shariati employed selective ideas of Georges Gurvitch (with whom he took some courses) to give his own views rational justification and focus. Here, I deal only with some key concepts that Shariati adopted from the French sociologist.

1. Shariati often repeats, with strong conviction, a statement that he attributes to Gurvitch that "there is no society [in general]. There only exist societies [in particular]."<sup>10</sup> This, for Shariati, meant that each society or societal type had its own characteristics and dynamics of change which had to be investigated and discovered in a concrete way without the mediation of general laws presumed to be applicable to all societies.<sup>11</sup> Shariati particularly faults the ("institutional") Marxists for ignoring the principle of specificity.<sup>12</sup>

2. Society should be approached as a "total social phenomena" without any assumption regarding the predominance of any one sphere be it economy, religion or politics.<sup>13</sup> Society, Shariati argues, is not so simple as the Marxist categories of economic base and ideological superstructure assume. A multiplicity of phenomena including economy, language, religion, personalities and thought-forms figure in the

making of a complex whole which constitutes the social structure or "personality" of a society. The difficult task of the sociologist was to understand "the social composite" in which the material and the spiritual, the historical and the contemporary, continuity and change interacted in such a way as to make up the specific "temperament" and "character" of a society.

3. A related idea that Shariati very likely adopted from Gurvitch was what the latter called "the integral experience of the immediate"<sup>14</sup> which according to George Balandier "gives priority to data from intuition."<sup>15</sup> Shariati also insisted on "direct, objective, and experiential understanding" which for him meant not only that the intellectuals should avoid approaching society with the aid of formal categories and concepts but also that they base their knowledge of society on direct contact and mutual understanding with people.<sup>16</sup>

4. A critical concept in Shariati's analysis of the Iranian society is the concept of "time." Gurvitch applied his idea of differential time scales both to social strata and to global societies. In Spectrum of Social Time, he wrote: "When nations and civilizations...confront each other directly, the difference of their social time becomes apparent and grave errors are committed if they are not correctly delineated."<sup>17</sup> Whatever this statement meant to Gurvitch, to Shariati and before him to Malek Bennabi, the French educated Algerian Muslim thinker, it suggested that Islamic societies lived at some point in medieval period and their problem stemmed from a conflict of cultures and civilizations.<sup>18</sup> A related theme of Gurvitch's "dialectical sociology" is the need to identify the basic

tensions and conflicts in society as a means of understanding social structure and social change.

Shariati never engaged in a systematic and empirical investigation of any aspect of Iranian society. Following his social commitments and like his teacher Gurvitch he wanted to get at the "volcanic element in the social structure." Although his description of the Iranian society is based on general observations and impressions it is by no means devoid of some depth and fullness. He treats Iran as a traditional type of Islamic society and contrasts it with the modern Western society. Like Gurvitch's "global societies" and like Frantz Fanon's colonial quarters, there is a vast abyss that separates the two types (save for the presence of the modern sector which will be shortly introduced and discussed). The Islamic and Western societies, thus, are discrete and discontinuous societies with fundamental differences in economic structures, history, social relations and, of course, values, ideals and symbols. Iran is basically an agrarian society with the cities constituting parasitic formations superimposed on the agrarian base. Shariati discounts the existence of a bourgeoisie which he considers merely as a few middlemen engaged in purchase of goods from distant lands and selling them to a select few in the population or in the operation of industries which have only "symbolic" value.<sup>19</sup> The vast majority of the working people are either the rural peasants or "scattered bands of industrial workers."<sup>20</sup> Unlike the European workers who have developed their own class culture, symbols, and organization, their Iranian counterparts still inherited a rural background and outlook and shared with their exploiters a common

religious consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

The traditional society is a historical society in that the past is not a memory and historical period but "a time in which people live."<sup>22</sup> It is only a small isolated minority for whom calendar time and social time correspond. For the rest of the population "the 20th century is still a foreign news or an astronomical figure."<sup>23</sup> The most important difference between the two societies is religion. Unlike the Western society in which religion is confined to the places of worship, "here the society's pulse beats with religious enthusiasm and its whole organism is warm with it."<sup>24</sup> When Shariati's image of the modern sector is added to this picture what emerges is not a transitional society passing from tradition to modernity but a dualistic society with two different modes of life and culture. The infrastructure of modernity, Shariati claims, following Aime Cessaire and Dominique Sourdèl, is not economics as it is in the West but neocolonialism.<sup>25</sup> Thus, in vain do Marxists try to locate the fundamental contradiction of society in the economic sphere and between the bourgeoisie and the working class. Such a conception leaves out the vast majority in the traditional society including the workers who are, before everything else, participants in the tradition. As to the culture of modernity we have already discussed Shariati's views in Chapter 2. The most important thing about modernity is that it is the extension of "the other" society superimposed on the traditional society. For Shariati Iran is a transitional society only in the sense that modernity is constantly eroding the foundation of the main society and pushing it towards breakdown. As a result the relation between modernity and

tradition is one of increasing tension and polarization. Thus, the fundamental problem of Iranian society, in Shariati's view, was not the conflict between dictatorship and the people or between the bourgeoisie and the working class or even between the people and imperialism as liberal and socialist intellectuals perceived although these were of critical importance. Rather, it was a clash of "cultural selves."<sup>26</sup>

One study of Western sociological influence on Shariati's thought contends that under "the overriding influence" of Emile Durkheim Shariati wanted to revitalize Islam as the conscience collective of the Iranian society and that as Durkheim's organicistic image of society was materialized in fascism, Shariati's vision of Iran's future inspired by Durkheim was a totalitarian society of fascist variety.<sup>27</sup> Such an interpretation is based on reading into Shariati's thought a certain political view of post-revolutionary Iran. It also stems from a basic confusion between Islamic reformism and Islamic fundamentalism as well from a misunderstanding of the sources of the search in underdeveloped societies for unifying and mobilizing ideologies. At any rate such a claim is unfounded. As I point out in the following section of this chapter Shariati rejected the Durkheimian idea that religion is a product of society. Like Feuerbach, Shariati viewed religion as the supreme representation of man's highest ideals and values but unlike him Shariati considered the ultimate source to be divine rather than human. Shariati agreed that even universal religions can transform into "collective consciousness" but he had an approach to this issue which bore no relation to Durkheim's ideas on religion. Insofar as religion provided a framework for material and spiritual production of

members of society such a change was inevitable and welcome. However, if religion degenerated into a set of inherited beliefs and mechanically performed rituals divorced from its original ideals and values and was employed as a means of stupefaction and domination then such a religion had to be demolished and reconstructed. The fundamental reason for Shariati's critique of the existing Shi'ism was that it had become the conscience collective in the second sense. He attacked a great number of Shi'i beliefs and rituals and reinterpreted the rest in terms of what he viewed as high values of Islam and the humanity. Shariati had the same "dialectical" attitude towards the clash of tradition and modernity and the resurgence of the cultural tradition. It may well be true, and I believe it is, that by neutralizing the attitudes of many Iranian intellectuals towards religion and by convincing many more of the "progressive" character of Shi'ism, Shariati paved the way for clergy's mobilization of Shi'ism as the collective consciousness of the Iranian society. That, however, does not change the fact that such was not Shariati's project. In Shariati's thought the ultimate resolution to the basic problem of the Iranian society was a social revolution. But such a revolution was not to be a mere reversal of the trend which he detected in Iranian society and which he characterized as a movement from "imitative traditionism to imposed modernism."<sup>28</sup> He perceptively noted the resurgence of traditionism but he viewed this development as both a positive and a negative phenomenon. On the one hand, the resurgence showed that society was alive and putting up resistance before the onslaught of modernism. On the other hand, traditionism insofar as it was merely a

reaction against modernity and a reassertion of what Durkheim in defining conscience collective called "the beliefs and sentiments common to average members of society,"<sup>29</sup> it would degenerate into archaism. Shariati saw this outcome as a special danger of the confrontation between tradition and modernity. He lamented the fact that the members of the religious and bazaar community as well as women who had participated in the 1906 Constitutional Revolution had become by far more retrogressive as a result of modernity's offensive.<sup>30</sup> As I have tried to indicate throughout this dissertation Shariati's aim was not to revive the tradition, as it had never died, but rather to change it.

#### Islam and Nationalism

Shariati is described both as a Muslim intellectual "adamantly opposed to nationalist sentiments" and as an ardent Iranian nationalist.<sup>31</sup> Both views misrepresent the complex ideas of Shariati on the question of the relation between Islam and nationalism. In order to facilitate an appreciation of Shariati's contribution, I should like to provide an introductory background to the issue. The theme of the relation between Islam and nationalism is a century old and as yet remains unresolved. Islamists in general believe that Islam as a universal religion seeks to establish a universal political and cultural system and thus it is fundamentally incompatible with group loyalties based on ethnicity, language, and common history and culture. Some Muslim thinkers have at times endorsed nationalism but only in a negative sense of resistance to the occupation of Islamic lands rather than as a foundation for national cultural community.<sup>32</sup> By contrast,

the nationalists in the Islamic countries have sought to base their ideas of community on various dimensions of culture with religion constituting as one component among others. A third idea particular to the Arab world, has been to equate Islam and nationalism. The classical theoretician of this view is the Iraqi thinker al-Bazzaz who argued that Islam and nationalism were simply the two sides of the same coin. Islam was a universal religion, he conceded, but it was a religion that was first revealed to the Arabs as their special religion; the Quran was in the Arabic language and Muhammad was an Arab statesman and hero who retained the best of Arab social and cultural achievements in Islam.<sup>33</sup> Mu'ammar al-Qaddhafi of Libya adheres more or less to the same theory.<sup>34</sup> It is clear that neither of these perspectives even approaches an adequate theoretical solution to the vexing problem of Islam and nationalism. Islamists deny the objective foundation for the development of national community. Secular nationalists often deny or underestimate religion as an important component of national culture in Islamic societies. And the religiously inclined Arab nationalists make of Islam a national religion even though the majority of Muslims live outside the Arab world.

In Iran the problem of the relation between Islam and nationalism never reached the level of theoretical and practical intensity as it did in the Arab world. Nevertheless, the tension between religion and nationalism has been an integral element of every major turmoil in Iranian history. Whereas nationalists have always emphasized the secular components of Iranian culture such as language and literature

and pre-Islamic symbols and memories, religionists have discounted everything but Islamic loyalties. Some secular nationalists like Mosaddegh have viewed Islam as an integral element of Iranian nationhood giving, however, primacy to Iranian identity over religious affiliation. It was in step with this legacy that Teimour Bakhtiar, a former leader of Mosaddegh's national Front and the late Shah's last prime minister declared during the Revolution that "I am an Iranian first and a Muslim second" a Position which Ayatollah Khomeini unequivocally rejected as "contrary to religion."<sup>35</sup> The tension between the two perspectives has manifested itself to a degree that late Hamid Enayat made his empirical observations into a categorical judgment about Islam and nationalism: "Hence", he wrote, "although any nationalism is fundamentally irreconcilable with Islam, Iranian nationalism is more so than its Arab counterpart, and by the same token its conflict with Islam is much more difficult to resolve."<sup>36</sup>

What Enayat completely overlooks in his discussion of Iranian nationalism is the "religious nationalism" represented by people like Bazargan, Shariati, and Bani Sadr a kind of nationalism which has substantial following among the Iranian intellectuals, civil servants, merchants, and shopkeepers. This brand of nationalism deeply attached to Islam but primarily committed to Iran presents a more serious challenge to the militant Islamic internationalism presently in the ascendance in Iran than modernizing secular nationalism. In a book devoted to an account of the Iranian revolution Bazargan neatly captures the two different perspectives in the Iranian Revolution. The original aim of the revolution and of his own provisional government,

Bazargan contended, had been "service to Iran through Islam." By contrast the goal "that Mr. Khomeini had set for the revolution and for his mission was service to Islam by way of Iran."<sup>37</sup> Accordingly, Bazargan states: "the victorious regime considers its principal duty not to be the administration and reconstruction of the country and provision of security and justice but propagation, expansion, and perhaps the imposition of Islam."<sup>38</sup> The same theme has been raised by Abolhassan Bani Sadr, the deposed first president of the Islamic Republic.<sup>39</sup> Like them Shariati had a firm grounding both in the religious tradition and in Iran's nationalist movement. Unlike the Iranian clergy which derides Mosaddegh for his nationalism, Shariati considered Mosaddegh's national movement as "the most authentic movement for the liberation of our nation." However, Shariati treated the problem of nationalism and Islam as a serious theoretical issue and although his primary concern was Iran his ideas are relevant to other Islamic countries as well.

The notion of opposition between Islam and nationalism rests on a number of erroneous assumptions upheld by both Islamists and nationalists. The first assumption is that there is, in reality a unified and universal Islam unaffected by the diversity of historical-cultural formations which have embraced Islam as a religion and that the only true community in the Islamic world is one that encompasses the whole Muslim population whether Turkish, Moroccan or Indonesian. This is the basis of the common call made by Muslim thinkers, for example Abul-Ala Mawdudi, for the establishment of a world Islamic government and the demand on Muslim people "to dissociate

themselves from national traditions."<sup>40</sup> Such intellectuals take their vision of the Islamic future from the age of great empires which in the Islamic world and elsewhere were able to incorporate in their domain diverse historical and cultural communities. The vision of Islam as a unified and universal pattern of thought and behavior as the Arab anthropologist Abdul-Hamid el-Zein has effectively demonstrated is more an invention of Muslim theologians and Western Orientalists than a reflection of reality.<sup>41</sup> A second assumption is that nationalism is a full-fledged and exclusive ideology which aim is to negate and supplant Islam. Nationalists as well as their opponents have always confused rhetoric of nationalism with its reality. A close examination reveals that nationalism unlike formal ideologies lacks a distinct view of any aspect of the world, society, and economy and that nationalism as an orientation is compatible with any ideology be it liberalism, socialism, or Buddhism. As Albert Hourani remarked "Nationalism is not a system of thought but a single idea which does not suffice by itself to order the whole life of a society."<sup>42</sup> A third assumption is that nationalism must of necessity involve secularism. Thus, nationalism is taken as a fixed pattern of idea and behavior that must always duplicate the particular European experience. It is not clear why the consciousness of a distinct cultural identity and assertion of independence and integrity of a collectivity should exclude loyalty to one's religion. To complicate the matter further the Islamists without exception have resorted to the argument that ethnocentrism and chauvinism are integral elements of nationalism, a "fact" which is said to make the latter inimical to the spirit of Islam and its call for

equality and brotherhood among Muslims. In Shariati's conception of Islam as both ideology and culture or what I have called "an ideological-cultural system" all of these assumptions are seriously called into question. According to this formulation what constitutes the foundation of community is neither an abstract and universal Islam bereft of all national-cultural specificity nor a national culture in which Islam is reduced to a residue or made into a national religion. To make an analogy Shariati wanted to formulate for Islamic Iran what the East European intellectuals want to accomplish within the framework of Marxist ideology: Islam with an Iranian face. Shariati called his formulation "Irano-Islamic" identity.

Shariati sought to tackle the issue both from a social scientific and from an Islamic standpoint. The relation between Islam and nationalism, he argued, had been misunderstood by both Muslim clerics and the nationalist intellectuals. He identified three perspectives on the relation between religion and nationalism which he discounted as erroneous. One perspective equated religion and nationality viewing religion as an ethnic construction.<sup>43</sup> Here Shariati had in mind people like 'Abd ar-Rahman al-Bazzaz but more immediately those Iranians who viewed Shi'ism as an Iranian national religion. Shariati traced this view to Durkheimian theory of religion according to which religion is a social phenomena and expression of a society's collective spirit. Even if this had been true of primitive religions, Shariati argued, it could not explain the fact that all great religions took root outside their original birthplace.<sup>44</sup> A second perspective erroneously elevated nationalism to the status of ideology and therefore opposed all ideals

and values that originated outside the nation's boundaries.<sup>45</sup> Here Shariati had in mind the Iranian cultural nationalists who consider Islam as an imposed and alien religion. We have already discussed Shariati's arguments against cultural nationalism in Chapter III and there is no need to repeat them. The third perspective was religious internationalism of the clerics which denied the reality of nation and national culture. These perspectives, in Shariati's view, all missed the dialectical relation between religion and nationality and thus either opposed them to each other or equated them.<sup>46</sup> The reason for the confusion, Shariati argued, was that religion and nationality were on the one hand so interrelated that any separation of the two seemed impossible but were on the other hand two distinct and separate entities. Shariati defines religion in its pure form "an ideology based on a world view, a system of ethics, and a set of injunctions and rituals derived from them."<sup>50</sup> As such religion was a universal ideology addressed not to a particular group or community but to all men. By contrast nation or nationality was a historically evolved collective personality of a particular group of people manifested in its disposition, temperament, and behavior. Nationality bore the same relation to religion as personality to belief, reality to truth. To adopt or to formulate an ideology involved an active assertion of choice and will but a person simply inherited his membership in the collectivity to which he belonged. One could discard his own world view and moral ideals and adopt others but one could not do the same with his national-cultural heritage.

However, in social reality the question was not as simple,

Shariati argued, hence the source of the confusion. As an ideology religion always gave rise to development of culture and civilization a process in which various people participated. Each collectivity in its creative effort to understand and explain the new religion to adopt itself to its teachings and make it adaptable to its new condition came to produce cultural forms and lifestyles that "leave deep and undeniable impact on what can be called 'the personality' and 'collective spirit' of a nation..."<sup>51</sup> The outcome of the interaction between universal ideology of religion and the specific personality of a given group is what might be called, and I believe Shariati would no object, an "Ideological-cultural system," a unique configuration of conscience collective and universal religious values and ideals.

Shariati calls Iranian Islam "the meeting point of Aryan and semitic spirits," a byproduct of the transformative impact of Islam on the Iranian mode of thought and disposition on the hand, and the creative efforts of the Iranians to contribute to development of Islamic ideology and culture.<sup>53</sup> Shariati cites the Iranian traditions in philosophy, mysticism, literature, and poetry as integral elements of what he calls "Irano-Islamic" culture and the basic constituents of a specifically Iranian national identity.

Shariati categorically rejects the widespread "mistake" that confuses Islam's opposition to racial discrimination and ethnic domination with opposition to diversity of nations and nationalities in human societies. He bases his assertion on the following Quranic verse:

O Mankind, We have created you males and females, and made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. The noblest

among you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct.  
(Quran, 49:13)

Shariati gives a fairly full discussion of this verse but here I only point to two most important aspects of his interpretation. This verse, according to Shariati, indicates that the existence of distinct and independent nations is not a political theory or merely a sentiment but "a natural reality in creation" just as sexual division.<sup>54</sup> Second, Shariati argues, there is a profound and progressive reason in the division of mankind into various nationalities. The Quran has substituted mutual intercourse and knowledge for conflict, pride, and domination in relations among nations.<sup>55</sup> Equally important is the fact that the natural outcome of such intercourse is the growth of self-knowledge by various cultural and national groups.

It is essentially the knowledge of one another that leads to self-knowledge. In our times when the general tendency is towards exchange and contact among cultures and nations ...national self-consciousness becomes deeper and purer to the same degree that international and world consciousness is increased.<sup>56</sup>

Shariati's views on Islam and nationalism have come under severe criticism by the late Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, the Islamic theologian and a former colleague of Shariati. In Motahhari's judgement Shariati's view of the relation between religion and culture "amounts to a total negation" of Islam's mission which is "the establishment of a unified society and culture." Despite his great capacity for rational analysis, Motahhari does not directly address Shariati's sociological arguments but only rejects Shariati's interpretation of the relevant Quranic verse. But his effort to establish an alternative interpretation is quite unconvincing with the

conclusion that: " We know that the purpose of this verse is not to preach that different nations and communities should necessarily retain their individualities, remaining independent of one another forever."<sup>57</sup>

Shariati conceived of two modes of nationalism: nationhood as a foundation of community on the one hand and as an assertion of unity and distinctiveness in the face of external domination and threat on the other. In the former mode "nationalism" was a natural and thus a lasting phenomena. Assertive nationalism, however, after the achievement of independence and expulsion of colonialism had always become a deceptive cover for denial of social and class division. After the national revolution the focus of the struggle, therefore, must change in the direction of establishing equality and socialism.

## CHAPTER VI

### NOTES

1. Shaul Bakhash, "Sermons, Revolutionary Pamphleteering and Mobilization: Iran, 1978," in From Nationalism to Revolutionary Islam: Social Movements in the Contemporary Near and the Middle East, ed. Said Amir Arjomand (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984), P. 185.
2. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 5-6.
3. Shariati, Return, P. 58.
4. Ibid., 122.
5. Buzhan Jazani, "Islamic Marxism or Marxist Islam," Jahan 4: 37 (December 1985), P. 30.
6. Bagher Mo'meni, The Writers' Agony, (Tehran: n.p., n.d.), P.65.
7. Shariati, Return, P. 58.
8. Ibid., P. 330.
9. Ibid., P. 338.
10. Ibid., P. 237.
11. Shariati, Islamology II, P. 322.
12. Shariati, P. 191.
13. Although Shariati does not use a Persian equivalent of the term "total social phenomena," Shariati's meaning is unmistakable. See Return, P. 54-58.
14. Cited by George Balandier in his Gurvitch, trans. Margaret and Kenneth A. Thompson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975). P. 12.
15. Ibid.
16. Shariati, Return, PP. 107, 239, 337.

- 17. Georges Gurvitch, The Spectrum of Social Time, trans. Myrtle Korenbaum (Holland: Reidel, 1964), P. 14.
- 18. Malek Bennabi, "Islam in History and Society," [trans. Asma Rashid] Islamic Quarterly 18:1 (Spring 1979), P. 41.
- 19. Shariati, Return, P. 61.
- 20. Shariati, Responsibility of the Intellectual for the Construction of Society (Tehran: Ershad, 1970), P. 3.
- 21. See Shariati, Return, PP. 61-62. Also Characteristics, P. 392.
- 22. Shariati, Return, P. 64.
- 23. Ibid.
- 24. Ibid., P. 63.
- 25. Shariati, Return, PP. 173-4 and 78-80.
- 26. Shariati, The Pyramid of Cultural Sociology. Reproduced by The Union of Islamic Student Associations in Europe, PP. 6- 7.

The thesis of the conflict of civilizations is not a novel one as it seems to have been around for quite some time. As early as 1928 Leonard Woolf, the British social democrat, in his Imperialism and Civilization which contains a number of important insights regarding the dynamics of the upheavals and conflicts in the Islamic world at the turn of the century wrote:

In blindly pursuing [its] own economic interests, [imperialism] used [its] now overwhelming power to compel the Asiatic to accept just so much of the Europe's civilization as would serve Europe's interest. The internal condition of a country like China or Persia or even India today is a result of this crude imperialism. In all three countries the ancient Asiatic civilization has to a considerable extent been destroyed and the methods and standards of Western civilization, particularly in things material or military, imposed forcibly from above. These methods and standard are not fully understood by the vast mass of the people and here is thus a latent conflict of the two civilizations in the country as a whole and even in the mind of the most ignorant peasant. (emphasis added)

See Leonard Woolf, Imperialism and Civilization (New York: Harcourt, PP. 90-91.

27. Said Amir Arjomand, "A la Recherche de la Conscience Collective: Durkheim's Ideological Impact in Turkey and Iran," The American Sociologist 17: 2 (May 1982), P. 101.

28. Shariati, Religion Against Religion, P. 63.
29. Emile Durkheim, Division of Labor in Society, trans. George Simpson (New York: Free Press, 1945), P. 79.
30. Shariati, following Fanon, viewed the tendency to retreat and withdrawal into traditionism then observable in Iran as a case of social pathology similar to what Fanon had observed among Algerian Muslims in the face of colonialism. See Return, PP. 125-26.
31. See Scheil Amini, "A critical Assessment of Ali Shariati," in Iran: Essays on A Revolution in the Making, eds. Ahmad Jabbari and Robert Olson (Lexington, Kentucky, Mazda, 1981), P. 81. And Mangol Bayat, "A Phoenix Too Frequent: The Concept of Historical Continuity in Modern Iranian Thought," Asian and African Studies 12: 2 (1978), PP. 219-220.
32. See Rashid Rida, "Patriotism, Nationalism, and Group Spirit in Islam," in Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives, eds. John J. Donohue and John L. Espesito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), PP. 57-59. Hasan al-Banna Held similar position on Islam and nationalism as Rashid Rida.
33. Abd al-Rahman al-Bazzaz, "Islam and Arab Nationalism," in Islam in Transition, PP. 84-90.
34. See Marius K. Deeb, "Islam and Arab Nationalism in al-Qaddhafi's Ideology," Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies 21: 2 (Winter): 12-26.
35. See Hamid Algar, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), P. 284.
36. Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought, P. 125.
37. Iran Times April 12 1985, P. 11.
38. Ibid, June 28 1985, P. 11.
39. Abolhassan Bani Sadr, The Fundamental Principles and Precepts of Islamic Government (Lexington, Kentucky: Mazda, 1981), PP. 99-100.
40. Abul-ala Mawdudi, "Nationalism and Islam," in Islam in Transition, P. 95.
41. Abdul-hamid el-Zein, "Beyond Ideology and Theology: Search for the Anthropology of Islam," Annual Review of Anthropology 1977, PP. 227-254.
42. Hourani, Arabic Thought, P. 343.
43. Shariati, Recognition of Irano-Islamic Identity, P. 139.

44. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Ibid., P. 143.
48. Ibid., P. 140.
49. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 97.
50. Shariati, Recognition, P. 143-44.
51. Ibid., PP. 145-46.
52. Ibid., P. 147.
53. Ibid., PP. 280-81.
54. Ibid., P. 149.
55. Ibid., 150.
56. Ibid., P. 151.
57. Morteza Motahhari, A Prolegomenon to Islamic World View, Vol. 5: Society and History (Qum: Sadra, n.d.), PP. 54-55.
58. Ibid., P. 56.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE IDEAL SOCIETY: GUARDIANSHIP OR DEMOCRACY ?

In the brief period of his intellectual career Shariati suffered both political persecution and clerical intolerance. Although the themes of political freedom and civic tolerance did not become central to Shariati's thought, they do represent significant values to which he gave considerable (and at times passionate) attention. We have already discussed the idea of freedom in Shariati's thought which centrally means social and moral freedom. However, sometimes Shariati broadens his idea of freedom to include the right to hold and share views dissenting from those of a ruling ideology. It is one of the persistent if not dominant themes running through much of Shariati's work that human growth and freedom is contingent on the existence of diversity and conflict of ideas. Indeed concern with freedom is what distinguishes between two major Islamic perspectives in contemporary Iran. In these respects, Shariati clearly stands in the tradition represented by Mehdi Bazargan and the late Ayatollah Taleghani. In Taleghani's view "Any religion and school of thought that constrains man within its own limits and deprives him of freedom of thought is inhuman. That school of thought belongs to humanity which gives everyone the freedom to think outside its own boundaries."<sup>1</sup> The claim that Islam tolerates divergent and opposing views is supported by

reference to a well known verse in the Quran which says "there is no compulsion in religion." It is significant that this verse came to decorate the cover of all of Shariati's collected works published in Iran after the Revolution in a clear defiance of the impending theocratic dictatorship. Shariati considered it to be one of the prides of Islamic society in the past to have shown tolerance not only towards other religions but also towards the secular groups as well as those who disagreed with the dominant religious ideology of the time.

However, ideas of freedom and tolerance take concrete meaning when they are integrated into a vision of society and politics. Despite Shariati's genuine attachment to these ideas, it is not at all clear that Shariati's ideal social order fulfills the criteria. The ambiguity that permeates Shariati's works is nowhere so serious as in his political writings to the point that it calls into question the effectiveness of Shariati's contribution to the development of a liberation ideology. Shariati's ambiguity and inconsistencies make it possible for both Iran's theocratic leadership as well as democratically inclined Islamic opposition to declare Shariati as one of their own. Conflicting assessments of Shariati are also evident in the scholarly writings on Shariati. While Sami Zubaida writes, "in spite of [Shariati's] general distaste for the clergy, his formulation would not exclude the type of leadership envisioned by Ayatollah Khomeini,"<sup>2</sup> Shahrokh Akhavi sees a definite democratic orientation in Shariati's thought.<sup>3</sup>

A major source of the problem in shariati's political thought is that despite his claim that it is the ultimate aim of Islam to

establish an ideal polity, he has precious little to say about what such an Islamic polity would look like in any concrete term. This has partly to do with the fact that Shariati lacked a profound knowledge of either Islamic or Western political thought. But the more important reason is that traditionally Islamic political ideas have been formulated within the framework of Shari'a or Islamic law and by fugaha, the Islamic jurisprudents, a fact which accounts for the underdevelopment of Islamic political thought. In fact a case can be made for the argument that Islam does not need political philosophy because it already possesses a complete blueprint for a perfect political order which needs only to be made operational. This at the same time indicates the limits of the possibility of political reflections and disagreements in Islamic thought. One should also take into account, in explaining the thinness of Shariati's political ideas proper, the political conditions under which Shariati worked and which did not favor an open and concrete discussion of political ideas.

Beside being sparse and unsystematic Shariati's, political ideas are plainly contradictory and confused. He upholds incompatible values and visions of an ideal order without comprehending and exploring the full implications of each and without making attempt at reconciling them. He wants a society that is united by a common ideology but at the same time he considers dissent and intellectual diversity as a precondition of human growth and progress. He believes that sovereignty belongs to God but he also wants people to exercise it. He maintains that in order to prepare the people for democracy a temporary period of "revolutionary leadership" and directed democracy is

necessary but a Shi'i society eternally needs guidance and direction of a charismatic leadership who by force of example as well as by coercion would lead the members of the Ummat (community) to perfection.

Shariati's central difficulty was that he wished to belong to two traditions that have been throughout modern Iranian history in serious tension or conflict: Shi'ism and democratic constitutionalism. This tension finds one of its expressions in an essay that Shariati wrote upon his release from prison in 1974. In that essay entitled "O Freedom, Glorious Freedom!" Shariati writes: "O freedom, what prisons have I suffered for you and what tortures have I tolerated. But I will not sell myself to dictatorship; I am nurtured by freedom; my master is Imam Ali, the man of courage, strength, and patience and my leader is Mosaddegh, the free man who cried for freedom for seventy years."<sup>4</sup>

Mosaddegh although a devout Shi'i Muslim was a democrat and a constitutionalist even though he at times allowed himself, under very strenuous circumstances, to overstep the boundaries. Ali (d. 661) is the supreme spiritual and political leader in the Shi'i tradition. Although he came to power with a popular mandate more so than any other historical Islamic rulership, he represents in the mainstream Shi'i tradition the ideal of the absolute primacy of leadership. As a devout Shi'i Shariati also believed in the centrality of Imamat (spiritual leadership) which in the absence of the Imam, translates itself into what Shariati calls "correct leadership."<sup>5</sup> In his total idealization of an Islamic polity Shariati assumed that a government that patterned itself after Ali's government could not possibly come into conflict with such exalted human values as freedom and tolerance.

Had Shariati lived to see the full flowering of the principle of righteous authority, there is little doubt that he, like Bazargan and Taleghani who also beheld Ali's government as a model which would secure freedom and justice to the community, would have stressed the democratic elements in his thought. As it stands Shariati's thought reflects an incoherent and unsuccessful attempt to resolve the central tension between the Shi'i idea of guardianship on the one hand and democracy on the other.

In a most basic sense, there are only two pure principles for the organization of a society, the principle of guardianship and the principle of democracy. Tyranny in its pure form has no principle for it relies for its justification on sheer coercion. The principle of democracy rests on the assumption that if individuals are to pursue their aims in a harmonious fashion and if they are to abide by laws, they ought to share in the devising of society's laws and institutions. The principle of guardianship, on the other hand, rests on the premise that most people are incapable of knowing their own best interests and therefore a select minority in possession of certain virtues and special knowledge ought to make laws and devise institutions for society as a whole. But there is a third idea that has come to be known as the idea of guided democracy. The first thinker to give the idea a coherent expression was John Stuart Mill. Unlike many Western thinkers from Aristotle to Montesquieu who considered despotism a form of government natural to the East, Mill viewed the idea of representative government to be a universal one that knew no boundaries. However, while he thought democracy as representative

government to be superior to any other political form, he also recognized the concrete obstacles in the way of its adoption in the countries of the East. Citing such mental and social habits that militate against the success of a representative government such as extreme passivity and restricted loyalties, Mill suggested that the institution of a central authority committed to reform but unhindered by petty rivalries may aid in removing the obstacles to and preparing the conditions for representative democracy.<sup>6</sup> The idea of guided or directed democracy found a new formulation in the thought of Third World leaders such as Sukarno of Indonesia and became a major theme of Asian and African leaders gathered in the Bandung conference one hundred years later. In this new version, tutelary democracy is not only a preparation for but also a practice of representative government under controlled conditions. Ever since, the idea has become, in the hands of the Third World leaders, both a genuine plea for broadening of mass democratic participation as well as, in most cases, a justification for dictatorial rule. As a Muslim intellectual profoundly influenced by Third World thought, Shariati was very much fascinated with the idea of guided democracy. He even tried to justify the historical Imamate in terms of that concept.

Shi'ism has been regarded as an authoritarian outlook by both Western Islamologists such as Montgomery Watt and by liberal Sunni thinkers such as the Egyptian Ahmad Amin (d. 1954) for its extreme emphasis on leadership and appointment from above rather than on the community and the determination of leadership from below.<sup>7</sup> At issue is the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad and the method of

determining the ruler of the Islamic community. The Shi'is believe that Ali, the first Imam, was appointed by Muhammad and the subsequent Imams were each, by the divine command, appointed by a prior Imam until the Twelfth and last Imam who went into occultation. According to Shi'is Imamate is an expression of God's grace to always have in the Muslim community an infallible leader and guide who does not make errors in judgment. According to the Sunnis, the Prophet determined no successor and the leaders of the Muslim community ought to be determined by the method of shura (council) in accordance with the Quranic verses which command Muslims to consult each other in their affairs. In his ummah va Imamah Shariati gives a rational and historical justification for the institution of the Imamate in a way that the concept of shura becomes as integral to Shi'i political theory as Imamat. In Shariati's interpretation, Shi'i Imams were individuals with sublime human qualities and were designated to rulership in recognition of the fact that the Muslims and the Islamic society after Muhammad were not yet ready for the implementation of shura. Had the Imams ruled the Muslim community in the span of time foreseen by the Prophet, the Islamic society would have become prepared for self-rule and democracy.

But the question is what is to be the form of government with the Twelfth Shi'i imam in occultation? Is it democracy, guardianship or a synthesis of the two? In order to understand Shariati's response it would be useful to briefly present a background in Shi'i political theory here. According to Iran's ruling clergy, Shi'ism has one political theory and that is the Velayat-e Faqih or the guardianship of

the jurisprudent. However, informed and committed Shi'i disagrees wholly or partially with the idea.<sup>8</sup> When one considers the Shi'i disagreements as well as the history of Shi'i thought and practice what emerges is not one Shi'i theory but a number Shi'i orientations to politics as follows:<sup>9</sup>

1. Quietism. This orientation which has been prominent in the Shi'i community since the formulation of the Shi'i doctrine by Imam Ja'far as-Sadeq in the eighth century is that all temporal governments not headed by one of the Imams are imperfect. In this orientation the stress is on religious rather than political aspect of the Imamat.<sup>10</sup> Such a view has a solid foundation in Shi'i history as well as in contemporary practice of such supreme leaders of Shi'ism as Ayatollahs Borujerdi, Mar'ashi-Najafi, and Golpaygani. Some ulama have even provided a theoretical justification for this attitude.

The Imamat and Caliphate are two separate subjects and are compatible. From the Shi'i standpoint, the occupation of Imamate does not require existential Caliphate...If the difference between Imamate and Caliphate was fundamental, there would have been wars for it...The insistence surrounding the Imamate is only for this reason that the spiritual position is not confused with monarchy...The Caliphate [is] the trustee and the protector of worldly treasures and Imam [is] the trustee and guardian of the treasures of the divine and Prophetic knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

It is interesting that the above statement is cited by Shariati in approval as an example of Shi'i ulama's gracious attitude towards the Sunnis. Shariati seems to be oblivious to the central message that refutes his own contention that Shi'ism is a revolutionary political religion. At any rate, Shariati rejected quietism and separation of religion from politics as distortion of true Shi'ism.

2. Oppositionism. Although a late development in Shi'i history,

resistance and opposition to temporal authority has a firm foundation in Shi'i history in the belief that "Imamate is the rule of this world and the next." With the last Imam in occultation temporal authorities enjoy a de facto legitimacy if only they accept the Twelver Shi'i doctrine, protect the Shi'i community against external and domestic enemies and do not violate the shari'a. This formulation has been a continuing source of both cooperation and tension between Shi'i ulama and the existing governments. Prior to his formulation of the theory of the "Guardianship of the Jurisprudent" in 1970, Ayatollah Khomeini also adhered to this theory.

The oppositionist tendency is also apparent and occasionally strong in Shariati's thought and sometimes manifests itself as an anarchist and anti-establishment ideology. This orientation which has deep root in Shi'i messianism was no doubt reinforced by Shariati's attraction to such philosophers of permanent negation as Georges Gurvitch and Jean Paul Sartre. However, Shariati's utopia is the past. He considered Imam Ali's rule as the Archimedean point against which all government and institutions must be judged and since all fall short of the ideal, must be opposed.<sup>12</sup>

3. Revolutionism. By revolutionism here is meant the Shi'i outlook that in the absence of the Twelfth Imam it is incumbent upon Muslims to form an Islamic government. This is a new phenomena in Shi'i theory and practice and khomeini has a central place in its development. To the rise of Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology, Shariati also made a decisive contribution.

Here I put forward Khomeini's thesis briefly and only as a point

of reference rather than as a means of comparison. According to Khomeini it is the prime duty of every Muslim to engage in the efforts to establish an Islamic state for, he asks, how else would the Shari'a, the immutable laws of Islam be implemented?<sup>13</sup> In Khomeini's view, Islam is a complete and comprehensive ideology and social system that has provisions for every aspect of man's life. It needs only be implemented. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the fujaha to interpret the laws of Islam and see to its implementation. This, in a nutshell, is Khomeini's theory of Islamic government known as the "guardianship of the jurisprudent." Shariati also believed that Islam had all the elements of a perfect ideology and an ideal social order. However, he also held the view that Islamic system of thought, if it was to be suitable to the modern world and withstand its torrents, had to be reconstructed and the Islamic materials themselves refined. The difference between Ayatollah Khomeini and Shariati, to employ a lucid phrase of Muhammad Arkoun, is "Islam mobilized as compared to Islam reinterpreted."<sup>14</sup> But the most important and crucial difference is that for the latter the foundation of the Islamic edifice as ideology as well as social order is the worldview and ethical system of Islam rather than the shari'a or the Islamic law. In Shariati's view, it is in reference to Islamic worldview and ethics that the practical injunctions of Islam in social, political, and economic affairs are to be considered and determined. This is a forceful and persistent idea that runs throughout Shariati's writings and constitutes the central core of his vision of Islam. Yet, because Shariati did not clearly formulate this very provocative view it has been completely overlooked

in the literature on Shariati. The following paragraph is cited here as a textual evidence for my assertion. The statement is made in response to a question from a member of the audience to one of Shariati's lecture: "Are all the injunctions that Muhammad issued at the time of his Prophetic mission limited to time and the kinds of people [he addressed] or could they be applicable to many generations?"

Your question concerns fixity or flexibility of religion for we see that society and social needs change but if religion is static it falls behind society, that is. We develop needs to which religion is not responsive [or] religion has solutions for problems that are no longer present. There were commands that were necessary but no longer. Then, is religion a fixed or changing entity? First, we must consider the question of what we mean by religion. Religion has three dimensions. The first dimension is our worldview, namely the way we see the world, man, and the place of man in the world and what meaning we attach to it as well as how we organize life on that basis. This is a fixed element of religion and never changes but only evolves....The world, monotheism, nature, and man are fixed in the Islamic worldview but our cognition as Muslims along with evolution in our philosophy, science, civilization and culture is subject to evolution and must be so. For the same reason we must understand monotheism and the Quran better than the philosopher that lived in the second and the third century for there is a vast difference between man then and contemporary man. Second, the ethical values of Islam are eternal and fixed. Heroism, generosity, courage, bravery, disregard for self interest, preference for the interest of others over one's own, struggle for human ideals and resistance to imposition are all human values [and thus] fixed which do not disappear but rather reach perfection and growth.

...There remains the practical injunction. They are divided into two groups. First the worship which relate to the course of human self-reconstruction and perfection of existential values and the establishment of conscious relation with God as the consciousness of the existence. This is unchangeable...<sup>15</sup>

Before Shariati comes to discuss the practical injunctions of Islam regarding relations among men, namely, the political, social, and economic issues there is a brief intervening question and answer after which according to the editors of Shariati's works "Here the tape ends

and the subject remains unfinished."<sup>16</sup> From Shariati's approach to polygamy which he views as a historically contingent Quranic injunction necessitated by the prevalence of widows and orphans due to Islamic wars<sup>17</sup> and from his many references to dynamism and flexibility of Islamic laws, it becomes clear that Shariati shares with Islamic reformism elsewhere the view that the Islamic injunctions as they relate to human affairs, are changeable. This position is clearly formulated by Abdulla al-Maraghi and quoted by Al-Sadeq al-Mahdi in his essay entitled "Islam-Society and Change:"

Islamic injunctions are divided into two. The first group is concerned with regulation the relations between Allah and man and in beliefs and worship. There are God-given and so that they may not be extended by analogy or any other means....The second group deal with relations between men. Here the Holy Text employs welfare criteria and injunctions have an explicitly functional purpose. Change here is possible when circumstances change.<sup>18</sup>

The central point to stress is that for Shariati it is the Islamic worldview and system of ethics rather than shari'a that must constitute the primary frame of reference for arriving at solutions to social problems of society. In order to illustrate the difference between Shariati's view with that of the jurisprudential perspective I shall provide the following example. According to Shariati a central tenet of Islamic ethics is action performed for the benefit of society. Also, an implications of Shariati's monotheistic worldview is that Islamic society in order to undermine the foundation of personal dependence and secure the basis for social and moral development of all Muslims, must prevent concentration of wealth in a few hands. A jurisprudential view of the same question is put forward in a critique of Shariati by Hojjatoleslam Mohammad Javadi-Kermani, a member of

Iran's Islamic Assembly who correctly considers Shariati "as a thinker who wants to formulate new principles for understanding religion [and] overturn the past principles."<sup>19</sup> He states:

Shariati did not have a precise understanding of our principles. This is very delicate question. You cannot find a jurisprudent that considers 'harm to other' as permissible, that is, to declare that it is permissible to engage in a transaction that harms another person. 'No harm and no harmed' is one of the postulates of our jurisprudence... But you note that there is nothing in our fatwas (religious decrees) that forbids the current bazaar transaction that bring millions to (even after the religious dues are paid) to the merchants. Why? I would say because it has not become obvious to the jurisprudent that the case of 'no harm' is applicable here. This is a science, an economic science. What if an economic system became harmful from the foundation? If the capitalist system as exists in our country were recognized as harmful, no jurisprudent would consider it as Islamic... [However], Shariati insisted that these decrees existed because the clerics were dependent on the bazaar.<sup>20</sup>

Although Hojjati-Kermani speaks with a voice of infallible collective authority, Ayatollah Taleghani a jurisprudent of a higher station, albeit one who remained marginal to the main circle of the ulama agrees with Shariati that the Islamic injunctions endorsing capitalism and great inequalities do indeed reflect "the influence of the milieu."<sup>21</sup> But our main concern here is with the difference between two methods of approach to Islam rather with the substance of the disagreement. Shariati always spoke with a personal voice and while holding to his own interpretations of islam, believed that a person's view of islam was conditioned by his social orientation and no amount of divinization could overcome this gap between man and the divine. Shariati's conclusion was that the question where Islam stood for in social issues should be a matter of debate and consensus rather than authoritative dogmatism.

Thus, according to Shariati, it is the responsibility of all committed Muslim intellectuals knowledgeable about the Quran and the authentic Prophetic tradition and aware of social problems to formulate an Islamic worldview and ethics that would provide the foundation for Islamic theory and practice. One of Khomeini's central argument in his Guardianship of the Jurisprudent in support of the view that the faqih must rule is the Prophetic hadith (saying) that the fugaha of Islam are the legatees of the prophets.<sup>22</sup> Shariati also accepts and often cites this hadith but he understands by faqih what it had meant in early Islam, namely, "a person who knows the spirit, the aim, the teachings and the laws of Islam."<sup>23</sup> For Shariati "fiqh means Islamology."<sup>24</sup> Shariati maintained that the reduction of fiqh to a knowledge of the ordinances of Islam was a recent historical development.<sup>25</sup> The result of such reductionism had been that a great part of the Islamic teachings related to humanity and society had remained obscure or dealt with dogmatically and superficially in the traditional Islamology. Although fiqh constituted only one branch of Islamic knowledge, people had become accustomed to "expect to learn from the faqih in all respects."<sup>26</sup> Moreover Shariati argued that every Islamic injunction had many other dimensions and implications besides the legal one. A question, for example, such as zakat (Islamic taxation) was at the same time a political, a sociological, and an ethical question and therefore the subject of interest and investigation for a variety of fields beside that of jurisprudence.<sup>27</sup> What Shariati was suggesting was division of labor and "specialization in widest scientific and modern sense of the term."<sup>28</sup> According to this scheme Muslim intellectuals

would be able to research and study all aspects of Islamic teachings and submit their findings to collective debate and discussion.<sup>29</sup>

The center weight in the formulation of an Islamic worldview and ethics as well as the elaboration of the practical aspects of Islam, in Shariati's thought, is given to those Muslim intellectuals who have a working knowledge of Islam but are also educated in modern scientific approaches to social issues. But Shariati's idea of "intellectual" includes the progressive ulama as well as the secular intellectuals who are willing to work within the parameters of Islamic ideology.

Shariati is far less anticlerical than he is usually made out to be. Shariati's relation to the Shi'i clergy should be understood not in terms of his sharp statements which are often directed at a particular orientation but in terms of Shariati's own perspective on Islam.

Shariati had the highest respect for the integrity of many members of the ulama and their profound knowledge of some aspects of Islamic history and thought. Nevertheless, it was Shariati's view that jurisprudence constituted only one branch of Islamic learning and the fugaha constituted one category of Muslim intellectuals whose views could not be considered ultimate and overriding. In fact, Shariati questioned the soundness and validity of the methods by which the Shi'i fugaha arrived at their rulings and had bold suggestions for reform in "the foundations of Islamology and the intellectual and jurisprudential ijtihad."<sup>30</sup> He rejected the Shi'i principles of jurisprudence, that is, ijma (the consensus of the Shi'i jurists) and aql (deductive and discursive reasoning) and considered them to be inadequate channels for approaching and understanding the primary

sources of Islam: The Quran and the Prophetic Sunna (sayings and practice). There was nothing sacred about these methods of study, Shariati argued. There were purely historical constructions and as such reflected the level of cultural and intellectual development of the times in which they were devised. Shariati believed that the principles of ijtihad must change in the direction of change and evolution in society and human thought. Shariati suggested that ijma and aql be replaced with "science" and "time." The results of ignorance about the modern world and the modern sciences by the Muslim clergy had been, according to Shariati, "formulating economic views of Islam and issuing decrees about usury without knowing [anything] about modern economics; deciding the duties of the people and claiming the leadership of the Muslim community and the deputyship of the Imam of the Age without understanding politics."<sup>31</sup>

The foregoing tells us something important about Shariati's political thought. First that Shariati does not accept the theory of "the guardianship of the jurisprudent" as formulated by Ayatollah Khomeini. Thus, Zubaida's view that there is nothing in Shariati that negates the theory of velayat-e-faqih is based on a hasty and partial reading of Shariati. Second, that the Muslim intellectuals have central place in formulating the theoretical views and practical policies of an Islamic society. Should we then declare Shariati's ideal state a "dictatorship of the intellectuals?"<sup>32</sup> To be sure this is still a theory of guardianship based on special virtues and knowledge but one that is by far more inclusive and incorporates a great majority of the Muslim intellectual elites. But the problem is

that Shariati is not clear who the actual rulers are in an Islamic society. In his Islamic Government, Ayatollah Khomeini argues that the ulama are the legatees of the prophets and thus inherit both the knowledge of the prophets as well as their function of governorship. In other words, the ulama carry out the function of both Prophets and the Imams. In Shariati's thought it is quite clear that all the Muslim intellectuals and not just the traditional ulama are the legatees of the prophets. But Shariati does not seem certain as to whether they also inherit the function of rulership. The question is, then, who is the sovereign in an Islamic Shi'i state, the Muslim intellectuals on behalf of both God and the people, the Muslim masses, or the ulama aided and consulted by the Muslim intellectuals? One can find support for either of these alternatives in the political thought of Shariati. A similar type of question was asked by the late Islamic theologian and philosopher, Ayatollah Tabatabai a decade before Khomeini gave a definite answer to the question of who should rule in an Islamic society. After establishing the need of the Shi'i society for rulership and guardianship, Tabatabai asks "Does guardianship belong to all Muslims or the most just among them or does it belong to the faqih (in contemporary sense of that term)?"<sup>33</sup> He refers the solution of these questions to the jurisprudents. Shariati seems to have never dared to give a clear and unequivocal answer to these questions.<sup>34</sup>

Shariati divides the political history of Shi'ism into four periods. The first period is the rule of the Prophet; the second period is the rule of the past Imams, and the forth period belongs to rule of the coming Mahdi. In all of these, leadership is chosen by God

and the community is ruled from above. Shariati considers the third period, namely the time of the Great Occultation, as the period of "democracy" in which "leadership of society...is based on search, discernment, and choice and consensus of the people; the power of sovereignty springs from the Ummat."<sup>35</sup> However, Shariati has to reconcile this view with the Shi'i theory of guardianship according to which the ulama as the general deputies of the absent Imam collectively exercise the functions of the Imam. A political interpretation of this principle implies direct or indirect rule of the ulama. It is noteworthy that Shariati accepts the general idea of Imam's deputyship and if one ignores his definitions of who constitutes a true alim it sometimes appears that he accepts the claims of the existing ulama to represent the Imam in his absence. In fact, the context in which Shariati makes such statements may legitimately give rise to such an interpretation. During the years that Shariati worked in the Hosseiniyyeh Ershad, he had the cooperation and support of a number of reform-minded and activist clergy. It was Shariati's hope that in time more members of clergy would share his vision of Islam and participate in the formulation of a progressive Islamic ideology. It is in such a context that Shariati made statements to the effect that the intellectuals are the legatees of the prophetic knowledge while ulama assume the function of the Imam.<sup>36</sup> In the same context Shariati states that "our differences with some of the faithful is a difference of language."<sup>37</sup> With the growth of tension between Shariati and his clerical colleagues the growing affinity came to a halt and was replaced with basic difficulties and disagreements. Later, two years

before his death, Shariati wrote that his "expectation from the clergy [had been] a form of naivete."<sup>38</sup> In the same correspondence Shariati writes:

... at this point in time Islam is going through its period of ideological inception just as the period of its initial inception in the years of the Prophetic mission. The difference between the two is in its source which at that period was the Unseen while in our period is the Quran. Then, the responsibility for both the Prophethood and for the Imamah was on the shoulder of one appointed prophet and now it is on the shoulder of all responsible intellectuals who are the heirs of the prophets.<sup>39</sup>

Even when Shariati accepts the leadership of the ulama, his vision of Islam and his conception of an Islamic education makes it clear that such ulama are more figments of Shariati's imagination than anything that prevailed in reality. If anyone comes close to Shariati's expectation it would be someone like a Taleghani, a Zanjani, or Ghafuri with whom Shariati shared both activities and ideas and all of whom came into sharp conflict with Iran's ruling clergy over the elaboration of the present Islamic constitution and the issue of popular participation.<sup>40</sup>

Shariati's vision of an Islamic social order is close to what Louis Massignon, the great French Islamologist and mystic whom Shariati considered his teacher and master, called a "lay theocracy": "theocracy because the codes of individual and social life emanates from God, Muhammad being only God's messenger and 'lay' because the application of these codes is incumbent upon all believers without any category of consecrated men to play a preponderant role in it-for there is no priesthood in Islam."<sup>41</sup> The term theocracy, however, may not be appropriate for characterization of Shariati's idea of an Islamic

social order. In his account of his conversations with Arnold Toynbee in Mashhad, in response to the query from the British historian as to how he desired both an Islamic government and popular rule Shariati rejected the idea of theocracy which he defined as a religious government "the natural outcome of which would be dictatorship."<sup>42</sup> In an Islamic society, he stated, everyone would assume responsibility for the implementation of the Islamic ideals. The absence of hierarchy and mediator between man and God is the foundation of Islamic individualism which would be safeguard "against the central authority."<sup>43</sup> But Shariati had a more concrete and solid safeguard against the possible abuses of power in an Islamic society. That was the concept and the institution of shura (council), an idea the reaction against which by the Shi'i clergy never ceased to haunt Shariati until his last days and which he largely abandoned for reasons of both faith and politics. It is very important to point out that the idea of shura in Islamic Iran is not an abstract concept as in the Sunni countries where Muslim intellectuals harp at the concept as the Islamic equivalent of democracy. In Iran the concept of shura, even though always neglected by the Shi'i clergy for doctrinal reasons, has had a significant impact and manifestation in politics both of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution and the more recent 1979 Islamic Revolution.<sup>44</sup>

In the beginning of his intellectual career after his return from Europe Shariati wrote a book entitled Islamology, a section of which is devoted to a discussion of the main principles of Islam. There, Shariati identifies shura and "freedom of discussion and expression of

views" as the main political principles of Islam. Citing the Quranic verses that endorse the idea of shura, Shariati writes: "ijma or the majority consensus which today is the only universally acceptable form for the realization of democracy is one of the social and political principles of Islam."<sup>45</sup> With regard to freedom of thought and expression, pointing to the open intellectual atmosphere of the early Islamic centuries, Shariati writes: "Intellectual repression and the monopolization of thought and beliefs within an established ideological framework is undoubtedly the cause for death of thought and the deprivation of society from new talents and ideas."<sup>46</sup> To be sure Shariati rejects "the absolute liberalism" and the ethical permissiveness of Western societies. The Islamic ideal in contrast to dictatorial rule and individual liberalism is "a committed or reform liberalism, the same as [what] some leaders of the new nations in the Bandung conference have called directed democracy."<sup>47</sup> These ideas had definite implications for the way Shariati viewed Islamic past society and history. In his book, he did not mention velayat or guardianship as the central tenet of Shi'i political doctrine. He did not stress the Shi'i belief in the appointment of Ali by the Prophet on the occasion of Ghadir and only considered Ali to have been the best among the companions to become the successor of the Prophet. There was a massive attack directed by the more vocal and Shi'i clerics against Shariati both on the pulpits and in publications. Such criticisms went to the heart of Shariati's beliefs and had an important impact on Shariati's expressions of thought. The discussion of the imamat and velayat became the overriding themes in Shariati's public lectures even

thought his definition of these concepts significantly differed from those of the traditional Shi'i orthodoxy. Even after many lectures and writings in which Shariati stressed velayat and paid the scantiest attention to the concept of shura, an influential teacher in the Qum theological seminary would still write that according to Shariati, "In Islam the principle of democracy and council and majority vote is the only criterion for the selection of the Imam (not just the leader) and [he] even believes that the principles and foundations of religion must be determined by means of consultation and election."<sup>48</sup> After the publication of his first major work Shariati was invited to join the Hosseiniyyeh Ershad and thus began Shariati's public career. In these years we observe much more of guardianship than of shura in Shariati's lectures and writings. The image of society that Shariati projects in his Shi'ism and Ummat and Imamat is a society united by one common spirit, fused with the state and under the guidance of a spiritual leadership which aim is not to meet the needs and interests of Muslims but to lead them to spiritual perfection according to a predetermined design. This is not to say that such an image of society was a new phenomenon in Shariati's thought. Already in his Islamology, Shariati defined nationhood as the shared faith by the members of society under a unitary leadership.<sup>49</sup> However, what had been a footnote became a major theme of some of Shariati's later works and the concepts of freedom and tolerance became marginal and secondary.

As Shariati grew away from the clergy, the latter ideas came to be much more emphasized. In his last encounter with the former clerical colleagues, Shariati, in response to criticisms of his Islamic

perspectives, reiterates a position that most clearly reveals the basic difference of outlook between himself and the clergy. Although, the central theme is the right of the Muslim intellectuals without training in the religious institutions to express views about Islam, the debate has profound implications for civic tolerance and political freedom. In that encounter, the basic point of the presentations made by the late Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari and Hojjatoleslam Ali Khamene'i and directed against Shariati is that only individuals with requisite Islamic training and expertise have the right and the credential to elaborate Islamic ideology. Shariati's response is brief and incisive: Formal training and licensed expertise in Islamic disciplines had failed to save Shi'i thought from several centuries of stagnation and rigidity. In fact, the intellectual revolution which had made Shi'ism into a dynamic and attractive ideology in recent years was largely the work of lay thinkers like himself. But the most important aspect of Shariati's response is his opposition to the need for "a commission of ideological orientation" that would have the ultimate voice in the shaping of Shi'i Islam as an ideology.<sup>50</sup> Much of Shariati's presentation in that same conference is devoted to the discussion of his universalistic criteria for a modern Islamic ideology (see Chapter 3).

Shariati's intellectual output was considerably reduced after this and similar encounters. A good portion of his works is in the form of correspondence in which Shariati frantically repeats his commitment to the triad of freedom, mysticism and equality giving his concept of freedom increasingly a political meaning. And to make sure that his

view are not posthumously distorted, he reiterates his strong opposition to "personal, intellectual, religious, and class dictatorship which prevent the free growth of man, his sentiments and arts, and kills human creativity..."<sup>51</sup>

Thus, despite his genuine commitment to freedom and tolerance, Shariati was never able to provide a synthesis between Shi'i guardianship and popular democracy. Shariati contained in himself the microcosm of what he described as "the intellectual fluctuation" in human history. In one of his last letters to his son Shariati expressed bewilderment at the fact that humanity has always been able to see only one side of the truth: uniformity or diversity. He contrasts the medieval integrism with modern libertarianism and Western pluralism with socialist unitarianism. The stress on unity, he argues, has always led "to uniformization and petrification and death of thought and spirit and dictation of beliefs, values, aims and even sentiments, namely, to dictatorship."<sup>52</sup> But then freedom has led to nihilism, hedonism and chaos. And now again the intellectuals are tempted "to turn the coin around and make a revolution." Shariati wavered in his ideas between ideological unity and spiritual leadership on the one hand and intellectual diversity and popular sovereignty on the other. This dilemma was clearly present during the recent Iranian Revolution in the attitudes and the behavior of the Muslim intellectuals who belonged to Shariati's spectrum of thought. They welcomed the emergence of Shi'i ideology and leadership and the unity that it brought to diverse social forces of Iranian society. They hoped that it would bring an era of Islamic style democracy and that

they would be able, as committed Muslim intellectuals, to share in the shaping of the future of Islamic society. But there was only one group that had a clear vision of what the future Islamic government ought to be. This group was the Shi'i clergy determined to implement Ayatollah Khomeini's Islamic government. It was only the jurisprudents that had the right to say what was and was not Islamic. The Muslim intellectuals were invited to join in the implementation of yelayat-e-faqih and the Muslim masses were mobilized to support it. The themes of shura and popular participation in the devising of the constitution as well as in the determination of leaders and policies became the central slogans of the democratic opposition of the emerging theocracy even though none had produced a single tract regarding the place of shura in an Islamic system of government. The following statement by Ayatollah Taleghani is perhaps the most cogent defense that was made in the revolution on behalf of shura by an important Muslim intellectual. It is also very important to note that the statement implies a denial of the ulama's claim to rule. Referring to the debate in the Assembly of Experts for drafting of a new constitution, Taleghani in his last sermon of the Friday Prayer in September 1979 told the public:

I have said a hundred times that the issue of shura is one of the most fundamental issues in Islam. Even God had commanded the exalted Prophet to consult with people and to ask them to rely upon themselves rather than the leadership. But not only did [the authorities] pay no attention...they are still debating this fundamental principle of Islam in [the Assembly of Experts]: how should they carry it out? Can they? Should they? Perhaps? The shura is the essence of Islam...If shuras are established you and I have nothing more to do and must get up and leave and the people assume all the responsibilities...They tell us: Sir! why are you discussing these issues among the people. Come and raise them in the Assembly. I tell them: I am raising these issues

with your constituents. It is they who have elected us. Let us stop imposing our personal will, and, God forbid, dictatorship in the guise of religion.<sup>53</sup>

A leader of the religious wing of the Mosaddegh's National Front, Iran's Freedom Movement, in which the youthful Shariati had been an apprentice and an activist, Taleghani also wanted to bring together Shi'i guardianship and democratic constitutionalism. He died a disappointed man.

## CHAPTER VII

### NOTES

1. Ayatollah Seyyed Mahmud Taleghani, Explication of the Mission to Establish Equity (Tehran: Enteshar, 1960), PP.44- 45.
2. Sami Zubaida, "The Ideological Conditions for Khomeini's Doctrine of Government," Economy and Society 11: 2 (May 1982), P. 161.
3. Shahrokh Akhavi, "Shariati's Social Thought" in Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi'ism from Quietism to Revolution, edit. Nikki R. Keddie (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), PP. 136-140.
4. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 128.
5. Shariati, Hossein, the Heir of Adam, P. 99.
6. John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism, On Liberty, and Representative Government (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951), PP. 292-305. The relevance of Mill's ideas to the development of democracy in the Middle East is discussed by Manfred Halpern in The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), PP. 223-232.
7. See W. Montgomery Watt, "The significance Early Stages of Imami Shi'ism" in Religion and Politics in Iran, PP. 21-22. For a discussion of Ahmad Amin's views see Hamid Enayat, Modern Islamic Political Thought (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), P. 42.
8. For an analysis of disagreement with Ayatollah Khomeini's theory of Islamic government by the ulama from within Shi'i tradition and by a Shi'i leader very sympathetic to Khomeini see Hamid Enayat, "Iran: Khumayni's Concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurisconsult' in Islam in the Political Process, edit. James P. Piscatori (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), PP. 167-169.
9. For the use of similar categories to characterize Shi'i attitudes to politics see Moojan Momen, An Introduction to Shi'i Islam: The History and Doctrine of Twelver Shi'ism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), PP. 191-196. There has developed in recent years a considerable amount of literature and a heated debate over the nature of Shi'i political theory. Here, I have adopted the very sound approach of Momen according to which a variety of political

orientations including activism and quietism have been historically compatible with Shi'i doctrine.

10. For an interpretation of Shi'ism as politically aloof and apathetic see Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ideals and Realities of Islam (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), PP. 166-67.

11. Quoted by Shariati in his Alid Shi'ism, Safavid Shi'ism (Tehran: Ershad, 1972), P. 78. In his Ummat va Imamat (P.132), Shariati rejects this very idea of separation between the Imamat and Caliphate as one arrived at by the Shi'i ulama for reasons of expediency and as means of appeasing the adherents of the Sunni faith. See Momen, Shi'ite Islam, P. 195.

12. In his Shi'ism (P.168), Shariati considers the duty of the Islamic leadership to keep the people active and in struggle "so that they no longer submit to oppression, poverty, and stupefaction and rise against them until the Mahdi makes his parousia." Also in his Expectancy, the Religion of Protest devoted to a reinterpretation of Mahdi concept, Shariati writes that the belief in the Mahdi means "an absolute negation of the established order and the status quo in any form." See Vol. 19, P. 303. He makes the same point in reference to Imam of Ali: "I am opposed to any order or regime and any government that is not similar to Ali's government or an Ali-type order." See Vol. 23, 198.

13. Hamid Algar, Islam and Revolution: Writings and Declarations of Imam Khomeini (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1981), P. 43.

14. Cited by Emmanuel Sivan, Radical Islam: Medieval Theology and Modern Politics (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), P. 179.

15. Shariati, CW, Vol. 21: Woman (Tehran: Sabz, 1983), PP. 279- 81.

16. Ibid., P. 288.

17. Ibid., P. 253.

18. Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, "Islam-Society and Change" in Voices of Resurgent Islam, edit. John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), P. 234.

19. Interview with Mohammad Javad Hojjati-Kermani in Sorush 102 (May 1981), P.43.

20. Ibid.

21. Mahmud Taleghani, Society and Economics in Islam: Writings and Declarations of Ayatollah Sayyid Mahmud Taleghani, trans. R. Campbell. Introduction and annotations by Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1982), P. 49.

22. Hamid Algar, Islam and Revolution, PP. 82-84.
23. Shariati, Alid Shi'ism, P. 177.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., P. 178.
26. Shariati, Hossein, the Heir of Adam, P. 276.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid., P. 277.
30. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 99.
31. Ibid., PP. 200-201.
32. This attribution is made by Mangol Bayat-Philipp admittedly on the basis of a very limited works by Shariati. See her "Shi'ism in Contemporary Iranian Politics: The Case of Ali Shariati" in Towards A Modern Iran: Studies in Thought, Politics, and Society, eds. Elie Kedourie and Sylvia Haim (London: Frank Cass, 1981), P. 164.
33. Mohammad Hossein Tabatabai, "Guardianship and Political Leadership in Islam" in Religious Leadership and the Clergy (Tehran: Enteshar, 1962), PP. 96-97.
34. Ibid., P. 97.
35. Shariati, Alid Shi'ism, P. 214.
36. Shariati, Shi'ism, P. 266.
37. Ibid., P. 180
38. Shariati, To the Familiar, P. 214.
39. Ibid., 209-210.
40. Both Ayatollah Mahmud Taleghani and Abulfazl Zanjani were the leaders of the Iran's Freedom Movement, the religious wing of the National Front in the 1950's in which Shariati was a young activist. It is interesting that the senior Zanjani, in opposing Khomeini's concept of government in 1979 used the same attributions that Shariati had made against the religious government in medieval Christianity. He likened the role of the faqih to that of the Pope and the Council of Guardians in Islamic Republic to the Council of the Cardinals in the Catholic Church. See Sepehr Zabih, Iran Since the Revolution (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), P. 80. For

Shariati's discussion of the meaning of "religious government," see Shariati, Religion Against Religion, P. 197. Also Ali Golzadeh Ghafuri, one of Shariati's colleagues and a member of the Assembly of Experts came to be a serious critic of the regime. See the interview with Ghafuri in Goftar, No. 20 (May 1981).

41. For Louis Massignon's view of an Islamic state see Rene Habachi, "Cultural Values and Scientific Progress," in Problems of Culture and Cultural Values in the Contemporary World (Paris: Unesco, 1983), P. 43.

42. Shariati, Religion Against Religion, P. 197.

43. Ibid., P. 198.

44. One of the basic theoretical justifications for the Shi'i ulama's participation in the Revolution was cited by Ayatollah Na'ini to be the Quranic verse on Shura. See Mohammad hossein Na'ini's treatise Admonition and the Refinement of the People (n.p.: n.p., 1955), PP. 53-54. In the recent revolution the idea of Shura also manifested itself at the popular levels of councils in factories and communities. Although these councils were, as independent bodies, discouraged by the central authorities, nevertheless they found their place in the present constitution. See The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, trans. Hamid Algar (Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980), PP. 63-65.

45. Shariati. Islamology (Mashhad: Tus, 1968), P. 39.

46. Ibid., P. 590.

47. Ibid., P. 591.

48. Quoted by Shariati in a reply to Naser Makarem Shirazi. See Seven Letters from the Martyred Struggler Dr. Ali Shariati (Tehran: Abuzar, 1978), P. 35.

49. Shariati, Islamology, P. 612.

50. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 34.

51. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 97.

52. Ibid., PP. 112-15.

53. Quoted by Ahmad Jabbari in "Introduction" to Seyyed Mahmud Taleqani, Islam and Ownership, trans. Ahmad Jabbari and Farhang Rajaee (Lexington: Mazda Publishers, 1983), P. xiv.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

We have posed the basic aim of Shariati as the reformation of Islamic Shi'i thought in the direction of an ideology of emancipation from cultural, economic and political subjugation. In this conclusion, I should like to deal with a number of questions that may emerge from my treatment of Shariati's thought as well as the relevance of Shariati's project and the methods he employed for its realization. To begin with, the view that Shariati was the Tom Payne, the Rousseau or the ideologue of Iran's Islamic Revolution ought to be dismissed. Such a view of Shariati permeates much of Western scholarship on Shariati and is also held by Muslim Groups and individuals in many parts of the Islamic world. Some of his works are included, along with the writings of such diehard fundamentalists as Abul-ala Mawdudi and Sayyid Qutb, in the teachings of the Egyptian Islamic Liberation Organization and Jama'at al-Muslimin (Society of Muslims), both of which use terroristic means to establish a pure Islamic state based on the Shari'a. These groups would have serious second thought if knew Shariati's thought in its totality and if they recognized that Shariati with all his genuine and justified opposition to cultural imperialism and cultural alienation considered himself, like Abduh and Iqbal before

him, as an Islamic member of "a world cultural community" rather than as a medieval representative in the modern world.

If there is one person who should be considered as the true ideologue of the Iranian Revolution is the late Islamic theologian Morteza Motahhari named by the Iranian clergy as "the martyred master." He was a student of Imam Khomeini, the central figure in the launching of the so called clergy reform movement in the early sixties and a founder of the modern institute for Islamic teachings known as Hosseiniyyeh Ershad in which Shariati did most of his teachings. After the development of serious disagreements between Motahhari and Shariati the former set out to refute every one of Shariati's major and original ideas in a number of important works devoted to the explication of Islam's views of man, history, and society. Despite Motahhari's excommunication of Shariati's ideas, the authorities in the Islamic Republic of Iran considered it expedient to retain the title of "martyred teacher" which Shariati had gained during the revolution in order to benefit from the "lasting appeal of Shariati" even though they suppressed every Islamic grouping inspired by or associated with Shariati's views, closed down the institute designated for the propagation of Shariati's thought and long delayed and in some cases prevented the publication of his works.

The reason for such stress on the political side of Shariati besides the fact that he had inspired a great number of people in the revolution is his presumed association with the Islamic guerrilla group known as the Mcjahedeen-e Khalgh (the People's fighters) which had a significant role in breaking the remnants of the armed resistance by

the old regime. There are definite efforts made to reduce Shariati to the status of this group's revolutionary ideologue. What is known beyond conjecture is the fact that Shariati and the founders of this group originated in Iran's Freedom Movement, the religious wing of Mosaddegh's national Front and that a good number who joined this organization were inspired by Shariati's interpretation of Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology. Shariati himself, for a time, came to develop sympathy for this group and wrote a number of tracts which exalted martyrdom and some martyred members of this organization. In doing so Shariati clearly deviated from his own conception of the role of the intellectual in society, a deviation which he came to seriously regret and which he viewed as the main reason for the failure of his mission. The task of the intellectual, according to Shariati, was "to transmit ideas" and spread enlightenment among the people "rather than to make revolution and change regimes."<sup>1</sup> In an essay entitled "Wishes and Regrets" which can be considered his intellectual itinerary Shariati briefly reviews Iran's social and political movements with a view to underscore the absence in them of a strong intellectual foundation which he considers as the principal factor in their failure. Shariati's most profound regret is expressed regarding the development of armed struggle among Muslim youth and, by implication, his own encouragement of it. The result of such development, Shariati reflects, was that many gave their lives instead of their thought and "the people who needed enlightenment became deprived of it and instead found martyrs...[Thus] my task remained unfinished and words unsaid."<sup>2</sup> One does not have to accept the substance of Shariati's view of

enlightenment to appreciate the significance of his reflection for the Iranian society. The Iranian intellectuals in search for change have been always obsessed with the overthrow of regimes rather with either the education of the people or the development a workable idea of a good social order. The favorite slogan of the Iranian revolutionaries, "death to the Shah" (and presently "death to Khomeini") encapsulates the intellectual poverty of the Iran's political movements.

To be sure there is an unmistakably an activist political side to Shariati but one that Shariati's intellectual reformism tends to constantly erode and undermine. Shariati wished to develop Islam into an ideology of revolutionary change. This is also the aim of fundamentalists like Khomeini and Qutb. But there is an essential difference. In the latter case, ideology is nothing but traditional Islam politicized. It is a divine "ideology" the realization of which requires an act of will on the part of the ideologue and faith and submission on the part of the rest. The relation of the follower and the leader in the politicized traditionism is based on taqlid or blind imitation on one side and admonition and exhortation on the other. Khomeini and Qutb do not just express their interpretations of Islam but its absolute truths. Thus, any resistance to such an ideology calls forth force and imposition. By contrast the formation of ideology in Shariati's view is an act of choice and creation in which every individual must take part. "The most characteristic feature of reformist Islam, in all its varieties," Binder wrote, "is the rejection of taqlid, or the doctrine of the requirement to accept received authority."<sup>3</sup> This is also the essence of Shariati's ideology.

Shariati's grand deviation from the traditional Shi'ism is not in his divergence from this or that interpretation of Shi'i Islam. It is true that Shariati discarded the encyclopedias of superstitions left over from the Shi'i past and transformed the Shi'i Imams into ideal human beings to be emulated. But more importantly Shariati fundamentally reinterpreted the parable of the sheep and the shepherd so so central to Shi'i social theory. According to an authenticated hadith (statement) from the sixth Shi'i Imam an individual who is without the guidance of an Imam is like a lost sheep separated from its herd and deprived of its shepherd. Shariati cites this tradition approvingly in his last encounter with his former clerical colleagues Motahhari and Khamene'i. But he defines Imamat as "orientation" (a literal meaning of the term, according to Shariati). In the absence of the Imam, such an orientation must be discovered and followed by the believers. The knowledgeable and experienced individuals could facilitate this search for orientation but there was no decidedly authoritative source that could determine its content and direction. Thus, Shariati stated:

It is Marxism that has state appointed 'committee of thought orientation' which constructs the ideology. In Shi'ism, we have no such a committee and this is one of the great advantages of Shi'ism which has left the road open for change and the individual can free himself from the tutelage of any leader, Imam, and guardian and take a different path.<sup>4</sup>

Such an image of Shi'ism as a decentralized spiritual authority has all but vanished under Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology in the Islamic Republic of Iran and it is quite understandable. In a politicized religion you simply cannot have too many people speaking on behalf of God or the Imam. Shariati's own view of Shi'ism as

revolutionary ideology shares some of Shi'i elitism and authoritarianism. But that only means that Shariati was confused and inconsistent. He was still in search of an "orientation" and was not quite sure how to integrate the many ideas that influenced him. This should be very damaging to a revolutionary ideologue but not necessarily to an intellectual reformer. Shariatism, in fact, thrives on search, inconsistency, and uncertainty and such characteristics represent its weakness as much as its strength. Shariati's intellectualism will always prevent it from becoming the focus of mass mobilization. This is the very weakness that Shariati attributed to Muhammad Abduh's reformism (Chapter 2). He wished to reconcile Afghani's exclusive and immediate interest in the political with Abduh's goal of lasting reform in Islamic thought. Shariati believed that the reform of Islamic thought in the direction of ideology would provide a synthesis. What he achieved in practice was an irreconcilable contradiction. Shariati's view of Islam as a revolutionary ideology may inspire young souls in search of revolutionary praxis as it did in the Iranian Revolution but it will not serve Shariati's complex, ambiguous, and humanistic views of an Islamic social order.

Shariati misjudged that Abduh's intellectualism and reformism constituted a weakness. Abduh has had more far reaching and constructive influence on Islamic societies and the Muslim mind than Afghani or for that matter all Islamic political movements in contemporary history. As Albert Hourani remarks Abduh's teachings constitute "the unacknowledged basis of the religious ideas of ordinary

educated Muslims.<sup>5</sup> If anyone deserves Shariati's designation of the enlightened Muslim intellectual as the legatee of the Prophets, Abduh is certainly an outstanding candidate. By the same token, Shariati's intellectualism and reformism also constitute the strengths of his vision of Islam. At the heart of that vision is an interpretive and humanistic reading of the Islamic tradition. Shariati's misconceptions regarding the transformative role of Ideology, his "faintly ridiculous" attempts, as one journalist put it, "to reduce the problems of the universe to schematic diagrams",<sup>6</sup> and particular aspects of his view of religion can be dismissed without discarding his contributions to the reformation of Islamic thought initiated by Abduh and continued by Muhammad Iqbal.

What is Islamic reformism and is it possible? In simplest terms Islamic reformism is a mode of relating the Islamic religious heritage to the cultural achievements of modern humanity. As such it rests on a number of rational and constructive foundations which I shall describe as follows:

1. Contemporary Muslim experience and interests should significantly determine the question of what is "Islamic" in the Islamic tradition with the Quran as the ultimate arbiter.
2. Recognition of "pragmatism" as a valid way of cognizing the world and organizing it. By pragmatism here is meant not any particular theory of truth but the general view that human practice, in the broadest term, is the main criterion for determining the validity of ideas and projects. Islamic reformism seeks to reconcile revelation with human practice. An important implication of this principle is

that because Muslim humanity has had limited practice in the past few centuries its consciousness has been stifled and unless it considers and reflects on the human experience elsewhere no amount of restating old ideas will prove adequate to the tasks confronting Islamic societies.

3. Formulation of an Islamic system of ethics and worldview that reflects the essential values and ideals of Islam and in light of which shari'a as well as modern developments in human thought and institutions can be assessed and utilized.

In order to appreciate the viability of Islamic reformism it is necessary to contrast it to its alternatives: modernism and traditionism. Modernism insofar as it seeks to confront and overcome the religious heritage has created an impasse for Islamic societies of which fundamentalism and revivalism are contemporary expressions. A statement of this position is provided by Hisham Sharabi who writes:

No practical solution of the contradiction between modernity and tradition seems possible without confronting the religious issue, not apologetically as has been the case so far, but critically. Until such confrontation takes place, Arab society will continue to live in ambivalence and mystification and to pay the price of cynical and arbitrary manipulation of its political life.<sup>7</sup>

This is an unfortunate statement by an otherwise fine Arab intellectual whom one would expect to know better after years of grappling with the ideological problems of Arab Muslim societies. The result of such an approach to the religious tradition has always been the marginalization of the intellectual in Islamic society and has brought about a severe backlash by the custodians of the tradition. It is one of Shariati's contributions to have convincingly demonstrated

this negative dialectic in the relation between modernity and tradition. He provides ample evidence from the experience of Iranian history to support this insight. I would add to Shariati's reflections a vivid and pressing example. Ayatollah Khomeini expressed his first public outrage in a most damning book devoted to the refutation of an attack directed against Shi'i religion and the Shi'i's ulama by a follower of Ahmad Kasravi. Discovery of Secrets was written in 1944 and remained obscure until much later but it may very well be the book that changed the world, for a while at least. Shariati's wisdom is well expressed by Muhammad Arkoun, an outstanding Arab Muslim intellectual who states that "Reform should not be made against religion; it will come by religion, in religion, and independently of religion."<sup>8</sup> Such a position recognizes an important place for modernism in the improvement of Islamic society and culture. Modernism must cease the conscious endeavor to confront and overcome the religious heritage. Rather, modernism must create its own space and work within its own sphere. Its central task should be to introduce scientific and critical tradition into the Islamic societies and formulate creative solutions to theoretical and practical problems of the efforts to overcome backwardness in social and cultural life.

Traditionism and fundamentalism also fail to adequately address let alone resolve the cultural dilemma of Islamic societies. Traditionism with its strong hold over the Muslim mind and behavior has deprived the Islamic societies of much human energy and initiative required for social development. Fundamentalism seeks to overcome this lethargy through politicization of Islam and the establishment of

Shari'a state. Historical evidence does not lend much credibility to the fundamentalist utopian vision. The Islamic nature of Pakistani Republic has not improved if not worsened decay and dictatorship in Pakistan. And in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the authority of the Shari'a and its custodians has at every turn come into serious conflict with the progressive clauses of the Constitution and the constructive aims of the revolution.

The central importance of Shariati for Islamic societies is that he was able to go beyond the dead ends of "modernism" and traditionism and point to the direction of a viable solution to this problem. Like his predecessors Abduh and Iqbal, Shariati had a positive albeit critical and constructive approach to tradition as well as an open orientation to the achievements of the humanity outside the Islamic world. This is a course that the Muslim intellectuals interested in the material and spiritual welfare of the Muslims have little choice but to adopt and advance.

## CHAPTER VII

### NOTES

1. Shariati, To the Familiar Audience, P. 98.
2. Shariati, Recognition of the Irano-Islamic Identity, P. 259.
3. Leonard Binder, Ideological Revolution in the Middle East (new York: John Wiley, 1964), P. 97.
4. Shariati, Revolutionary Self-Reconstruction, P. 34.
5. Albert Hourani, Arabic Thought, P. 130.
6. G. H. Jansen, Militant Islam (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), P. 158.
7. Hisham Sharabi, "Islam, Democracy, and Socialism in the Arab World," in The Arab Future: Critical Issues (Washington, D.C.: George Washington University, 1979), P. 98.
8. Quoted by Emanuel Sivan in Radical Islam, P. 165.

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